



**TO:** Assembly Committee on Health, Aging & Long-Term Care  
**FROM:** Kathy Miller, MBA, RN, BSN, Executive Director of Critical Care, Respiratory & Transport, Children's Wisconsin; Nora Stottlemeyer, MBA, RRT, EMT, Supervisor, Transport Team, Children's Wisconsin; Michael T. Meyer, MD, MS, FCCM, Chief of Pediatric Critical Care, Bauman Family Endowed Chair in Critical Care, Medical Director of Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, Children's Wisconsin  
**DATE:** Tuesday, May 16, 2023  
**RE:** Support for AB 224 – Ambulance staffing on aircraft transporting pediatric patients

Chairman Moses and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today. Today, we're here to share Children's Wisconsin's (Children's) strong support for this bipartisan legislation. We want to thank the bill authors, Senator Marklein and Representative Born, along with members of the committee who have cosponsored this proposal.

Children's is the region's only independent health care system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of kids. As such, we offer a wide array of programs and services inside our hospital and clinic walls and out in our communities. Importantly, with Children's 70+ specialty services, our 6 southeastern Wisconsin urgent care locations, and our hospitals in Milwaukee and Neenah, we see patients from all across the state, often caring for critically ill children and those with complex health care needs. When time is of the essence, Children's Transport Team is there to help kids and families get the safe and high quality care they need.

When an infant or child at another hospital or health center needs specialized pediatric care beyond what that facility can offer, their physician will call the Children's Wisconsin Transport and Provider Consult Center. A Children's Wisconsin clinical staff member will consult with the referring doctor, arrange transport if necessary, and make a plan of care prior to the Transport Team's arrival. Within as little as 25 minutes, the Transport Team is on the move with their mobile emergency department. This includes all sizes of pediatric equipment and highly-trained providers who offer specialized care. The Transport Team will go anywhere from a rural hospital that delivered a premature baby to another city where a 17-year-old has just been diagnosed with cancer. The Transport and Provider Consult Center fields an average of 9,000 calls each year to help community providers care for kids across the state.

Over the last 30 years, Children's has provided transport from referring hospitals to our Milwaukee hospital by ambulance, helicopter and fixed-wing plane. The Transport Team services Wisconsin, northern Illinois and Michigan and travels across the country to transport patients. Transport Team members are required to have a minimum of three years of pediatric or neonatal critical care experience or three years of experience in a Level 1 emergency department or trauma center. In addition, they must complete 16 weeks of additional rigorous training in neonatal and pediatric intensive care, emergency and transport medicine, flight physiology and trauma. Children's Transport Team includes specially trained nurse clinicians and respiratory care practitioners with a physician overseeing all transports and who may travel with the team as needed. These practitioners are trained in performing high-risk procedures, often receiving hands-on continuing education and completing regular competency checks. The team transports more than 1,000 patients each year with two Transport Teams working each day.

When a patient's care or circumstances dictate, we may transport a patient via air travel, known as air ambulance, flown by Flight for Life pilots. This includes via fixed-wing plane and helicopter. When we travel with pediatric patients via fixed-wing plane, respiratory care practitioners or respiratory therapists, are specified as legal crew members on the plane. However, for helicopter (or rotor wing), state statute defines

legal crew members on pediatric flights as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), Registered Nurses (RNs), Physician Assistants (PAs) or physicians (MDs) – leaving out an important part of the care team. Having respiratory therapists trained and available to serve as a helicopter crew members would be very helpful in managing patient needs and increase the number of staff able and at the ready to serve these critically ill patients.

Respiratory therapists help patients who are having trouble breathing and assisting with diagnosing, evaluating and caring for these patients by giving them oxygen, placing breathing tubes if needed, managing ventilators, delivering specialty gases through the ventilator circuit, and administering inhaled medications. The transport respiratory therapist also partner with our nurses to double check medications, perform patient assessments, and monitor the patients for subtle changes that can indicate improvement or worsening of their condition. They are also trained in advanced life support and hold certifications in NRP, PALS, and ACLS. Below is a story from one of our respiratory therapists which illustrates the critical role they can play in patient transport.

“We received a transport call for a very sick baby in Green Bay right at the start of our shift. This baby was intubated on an oscillator ventilator, required inhaled nitric oxide, 100% oxygen, along with being on several medications to help sedate the baby to keep them comfortable and help with their blood pressure. My nurse partner and I assembled everything we thought we would need to care for this baby during transport and our transport physician was notified to come with the team. We loaded up into the aircraft with the Flight For Life pilot and nurse and flew up to Green Bay – a 50 minute flight instead of a 2 hour ground trip.

When we arrived at the baby’s bedside, the physician caring for the baby met with our team and provided us with a hand off. After handoff was received, my partner and I went to work. We started first by assessing the baby, determine where all of our lines and tubes were, what medications were infusing where and what settings the baby was on with their ventilator.

We then began to transition medications from their IV pumps to our IV pumps. The baby tolerated these transitions well. The next step was transitioning the baby from the hospital ventilator and nitric oxide to the transport ventilator and nitric oxide. These transitions can be some of the most challenging transitions. The transport ventilator is very different from the hospital ventilator, so I spent time preparing my ventilator with settings I felt the baby would tolerate and we could make additional changes needed. We were now ready to try the baby on the transport ventilator and nitric oxide to make sure they tolerate it for transport. After placing the baby on the transport ventilator, we made a few changes to the settings and felt the baby was doing okay with the transition.

We then moved the baby into the transport isolette, secured her, and made sure all of our lines and tubes were secured. At this point, the baby’s mom was at the bedside and we were able to give her an update on how she did with all of these changes and what we were anticipating for the flight back to Children’s Wisconsin. Mom was able to touch her baby’s hand and give a kiss on the forehead before they left the intensive care unit left with the baby for the helicopter waiting outside.

The baby was safely loaded into the helicopter and we were on our way to Children’s Wisconsin. During the flight, I diligently monitored the ventilator to make sure the baby continued to tolerate the settings, assured we were delivering the right amount of oxygen and nitric oxide throughout the flight, and the baby’s vitals remained stable.

We landed safely at Children’s Wisconsin and got the baby up to the ICU. We were met by the ICU team that was anticipating our arrival. We provided a handoff report to the baby’s new care team and then worked to safely transfer her from the transport isolette to her ICU bed. As the transport respiratory therapist, I was able

to provide the ICU respiratory therapist a high level of detail on the baby's respiratory needs to help maximize the baby's care going forward.

When we got back to the office, we called mom to let her know we arrived safely and the baby did well during the flight. I was so proud of our team and how we were able to get this critical baby to resources she needed. As a transport therapist, I was able to fill a large role in this transport."

Pediatric respiratory therapists bring a unique skill set and expertise to the mobile critical care environment as experts in a child's lung function and the equipment to sustain a child's breathing before, during and after transport. Many medical professionals are trained to care for adults with lung diseases and are capable of making ventilators and other devices work on patients, however the pediatric respiratory therapist allows for pediatric intensive care unit-level respiratory care and is as able to match the child's disease to the technology.

Children's transport respiratory therapists commonly adjust and fine tune the respiratory support for a child while in the community emergency department as part of patient safety and to begin pediatric intensive care unit care. Once the patient is at Children's, the transport respiratory therapist leads the hand off regarding the child's respiratory needs and the transition from the equipment used on transport to the hospital equipment. The respiratory therapists' skills are essential components of the teamwork needed to care for critically ill and injured children and the respiratory therapist is a vital crewmember for inter-facility transport.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Children's Wisconsin's support for this simple, but important legislation that would provide the same staffing flexibility no matter the mode of air transport and improve pediatric transport for critically ill patients across the state. We encourage your support of this legislation and our team is happy to answer any questions now or in the future through our government relations colleague's contact information listed below.

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*Children's Wisconsin (Children's) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children's also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.*