



PUTNAM COUNTY EXECUTIVE KEVIN M. BYRNE

February 10, 2026

Chairpersons and Members of the Joint Budget Committee on Health,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and to share Putnam County's experience with two innovative, community-based programs that are already delivering meaningful results: our Early Learning Center, a Think DIFFERENTLY initiative, and our newly launched Community Paramedicine program.

Both efforts were created to address real and growing needs in our county. They are practical, cost-conscious, and focused on meeting people where they are, whether that is a young child needing early intervention close to home or a medically vulnerable resident who struggles to access traditional healthcare settings. I believe our state and other localities can learn a lot from the successes of Putnam County.

Putnam County, like much of New York State, has seen a steady increase in the number of preschool-aged children qualifying for special education services. At the same time, we face a severe shortage of inclusive, therapeutic early childhood programs within our county's borders. For years, this meant that some of our youngest residents were transported out of county, often to Westchester and Dutchess, to receive appropriate services. In many cases, children with intellectual and developmental disabilities as young as three were spending between one and two hours on a bus each way, every day.

That approach was disruptive for families, developmentally inappropriate for children, and costly for taxpayers.

The Early Learning Center was designed to change that and relies on partnerships with our County, local school districts, and other non-profit partners. It provides an inclusive, supportive environment where children with a wide range of developmental, behavioral, and sensory needs can learn and grow using a Universal Pre-Kindergarten curriculum. The program was intentionally designed as a caring and safe place for children who may have struggled in traditional daycare settings, whether due to hyperactivity, difficulty with classroom routines, or behavioral challenges. Rather than being displaced or excluded, these children are supported, welcomed, and given the tools they need to succeed.

The results have been encouraging. Children attending the Early Learning Center have shown meaningful growth and achievement, and in some cases have required fewer services over time as they meet developmental goals. Families can keep their children close to home, remain actively engaged in their child's education, and avoid the strain of long daily commutes.

Today, twelve children are enrolled in the Early Learning Center. Seven of those children would otherwise have required placement in out-of-county therapeutic programs, with bus rides of up to two hours each way. Instead, transportation times have been reduced significantly, and many families are able to provide their own drop-off and pick-up because of the center's proximity.

Just as importantly, this model helps address county budget pressures by reducing transportation costs and reliance on more expensive out-of-county placements. By licensing the center through the County and our Local Health Department, we have also expanded access to high-quality childcare at a time when childcare shortages are impacting families across the State.

We are hoping to expand our partnership with Community Based Services, our local non-profit that runs the Early Learning Center, to increase our student population and footprint among the pre-k aged children of the County.

In November of 2025, Putnam County launched its Community Paramedicine program, the first county-wide county program of its kind in the state, to better serve residents who face barriers to traditional healthcare access, including seniors, home-bound individuals, and those managing chronic conditions. Community paramedicine expands the role of paramedics beyond emergency response and allows them to provide preventive, non-emergency care directly in the community.

Through this program, trained paramedics conduct home visits, help manage chronic conditions, provide health education, and connect patients to primary care, mental health services, and social supports. They also play a critical role in prevention, identifying issues such as fall risks, food insecurity, or unmet medical needs before they escalate into emergencies.

In a county like Putnam, where transportation challenges and provider shortages can delay care, community paramedics become trusted healthcare professionals for residents who might otherwise fall through the cracks. This approach improves outcomes for patients while also reducing unnecessary 911 calls, emergency room visits, and hospital readmissions.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 40% of emergency department visits involve patients who could be treated effectively in nonurgent care settings. At least 40 states have launched mobile-integrated health or community paramedicine programs.

Community paramedicine expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic due to need to have ample COVID testing, provide vaccines, and keep elderly and immunocompromised residents out of emergency rooms and hospitals. Empress' Community Paramedics were called on and became the first in the state to vaccinate homebound individuals and were responsible for over 200,000 COVID-19 vaccinations.

Community paramedicine also strengthens coordination across the local healthcare system. It allows us to share key health and wellness information, while protecting patient privacy, and ensures that residents receive the right care at the right time and in the right setting.

Both the Early Learning Center and Community Paramedicine reflect the same core principles: early intervention, local delivery, collaboration across agencies, and responsible use of public dollars. These are not pilot concepts or theoretical models. They are active programs that are already making a difference for families, patients, and taxpayers.

Putnam County's experience shows that when counties are given the flexibility to innovate and tailor services to community needs, the results are stronger outcomes and better value for the State's investment.

With continued support from New York State, these models can be sustained and replicated in other counties facing similar challenges.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to improving health outcomes for New Yorkers across our State.