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# Congress of the United States

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### **REP. WAXMAN RELEASES A NATIONWIDE STUDY ON AMBULANCE DIVERSIONS, ACCESS TO EMERGENCY ROOMS, AND IMPACT ON NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS**

Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman released a nationwide study examining ambulance diversions, which occur when officials at crowded hospitals declare they cannot safely accept incoming emergency vehicles, causing patients to travel further distances to seek medical attention.

"The report finds that ambulance diversions have impeded access to emergency services in metropolitan areas in at least 22 states," said Rep. Waxman. "The problem isn't confined to Los Angeles or New York. Crowded emergency departments and delays in accessing emergency care are a nationwide problem."

The report finds that at least 75 million Americans reside in areas affected by ambulance diversions. Multiple hospitals in these areas have repeatedly restricted access to their emergency rooms by diverting ambulances, with the results that patients had to delay needed care.

"These diversions are occurring under current conditions, even without the added stress of a terrorist attack," said Rep. Waxman. "The findings of this report are a warning signal that our nation's emergency response capacity is severely strained and needs enhancement."

"We need to address the crisis in access to emergency care from several angles simultaneously," said Rep. Waxman. "First, we must support efforts by hospitals to improve their 'surge capacity,' so that many more critically ill patients can receive care at once. Second, we must pass legislation to address the nursing shortage, so that our health care workforce is ready for any future threats. Third, we must increase federal support for the development and testing of state systems to coordinate emergency care."

This report is not a comprehensive nationwide assessment of access to emergency care. Because of the lack of a national database of ambulance diversions, the report relies on published articles to indicate the extent of diversion problems at the state and local level. If an area experienced widespread ambulance diversions that impeded access to emergency room care, but there was no report on the diversions in the local media, the diversions would not be included in the report. As a result, more states and areas may have experienced ambulance diversions that impeded access to emergency rooms than are reported here.

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[Editors' Note] Interested reporters can obtain the complete report at the Committee on Government Reform Democratic Web Site at: <http://www.house.gov/reform/min>