



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Peter Oberacker

## Senator Oberacker Joins Bi-Partisan Call to Help Volunteer First Responders with College Tuition Aid

PETER OBERACKER May 24, 2024

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER, EMERGENCY SERVICES VOLUNTEERS**



**ALBANY – 05/24/24** – As part of Emergency Medical Services Week, Senator Peter Oberacker (R/C-Schenevus) joined other senators in a bipartisan effort to call for passage of legislation that would provide volunteer first responders with free college tuition.

**“I have served with my local volunteer fire company for a number of years and know full well the challenges our departments face, especially in rural areas,”** said Senator Oberacker. **“Training requirements are stringent, we lack volunteers, and equipment costs continue to rise. Albany needs**

**to take immediate action before we lose this crucial line of protection for our communities. Providing our hero volunteers with an incentive like college tuition is a step that will help attract more people to serve and help rebuild our ranks.”**

**Senate Bill 9033** would establish a statewide program to provide free SUNY, CUNY, and community college tuition to active volunteer firefighters, volunteer emergency medical services providers, and volunteer auxiliary police officers.

According to a **recent report from the state comptroller**, the number of active EMS workers has fallen from over 40,000 in 2019 to 33,000 in 2022, a 17.5% decline. EMS agencies frequently cited staffing issues including declining volunteerism, difficulties recruiting qualified staff, and low pay for EMS staff compared to other occupations in health care and public safety.

The comptroller’s report also indicates that local governments are spending more for ambulance and rescue squads with costs increasing by 59% from 2012 to 2022.

**“I support a number of bills to classify EMS as an essential service and institute additional tax exemptions and loan forgiveness programs for our volunteer first responders. Moving forward I will continue to seek out measures that will help draw more people to serve,”** concluded Senator Oberacker.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2023-S9033**

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- Introduced

- ○ In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- ○ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
- ○ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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Relates to providing free SUNY, CUNY, and community college tuition to active volunteer firefighters, volunteer emergency medical services providers, and volunteer auxiliary police officers

April 10, 2024

In Senate Committee [Higher Education](#)

Sponsored by [Jeremy A. Cooney](#)

Do you support this bill?