



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Senate Passes Changes to ‘Ropes Rule’ That Tied Up Volunteers, Wasted Tax Dollars

PATTY RITCHIE June 18, 2012

| ISSUE: [LOCAL GOVERNMENT](#), [FIREFIGHTERS](#)

Reforms Were Top Priority of Senator’s Mandate Relief Panel

State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced Senate passage of a bill that would scrap the state’s one-size-fits-all “Ropes Law” for firefighter safety, and allow local departments more flexibility to choose equipment that’s more appropriate to their situation and community.

The so-called “Ropes Law” stemmed from 2005 tragic “Black Sunday” fire in which two firefighters died while trying to escape the collapse of a five-storey building in The Bronx. The law has been interpreted to require specific, expensive safety equipment suited for high-rise emergency bailouts.

But it specifically exempted New York City, and instead applied the high-rise rules to rural and suburban departments where the tallest buildings could be a barn or two-story house.

“The ‘Ropes Rule,’ while well-intentioned, is a glaring example of Albany bureaucracy run amok, and taxpayers are the ones left footing the bill,” said Senator Ritchie. “Instead of purchasing expensive equipment that they may never use, and being required to replace it frequently, local fire chiefs will now have the flexibility to make safety equipment decisions based on what works in their rural and small town departments.”

“This eliminates an unfunded mandate, cuts costs to taxpayers, and still ensures the safety of firefighters.”

Under the new rule, fire departments would still need to be properly equipped to handle emergency escapes, but local chiefs could choose from a range of nationally recognized safety systems, instead of being required to purchase a single type that may not even be effective in their situation.

Reforming the Ropes Rule was a key recommendation of Senator Ritchie’s Mandate Relief Working group, comprising officials at all levels of local government who proposed 24 specific changes to state laws and codes that would save tax dollars, and improve delivery of services to taxpayers.

*** [CLICK HERE TO READ SEN. RITCHIE'S MANDATE RELIEF REPORT](#) ***

Local mandate relief has been a priority for Senator Ritchie, and she has voted to cut over \$100 million in state mandates that drive up local taxes. Several of the working group’s proposals also have been acted on by the Senate and become law.

The bill, S.7677, now goes to the Assembly, where final passage is expected.