



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senate Passes Measures To Support And Help Volunteer Firefighters And Other Emergency Responders

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 9, 2015

| ISSUE: **FIREFIGHTERS, TAXES, PROPERTY TAX, INCOME TAX, VOLUNTEERS/ING**

ALBANY – The New York State Senate today passed four bills that recognize the daily sacrifice and courage of volunteer firefighters and other emergency responders by offering them additional tax credits and education benefits.

Legislation ([S2727](#)) sponsored by Senator Joseph Griffo (R-C-I, Rome) would expand the tax credits available to volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers who play a vital role in protecting local communities. The state has sought to encourage more emergency volunteers by enacting a state income tax credit and local real property tax exemptions. However, volunteers are currently unable to receive the property tax exemption and income tax credit at the same time. This bill would remove these restrictions and allow volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers to receive both the tax credit – up to \$200 off their income taxes – and tax exemption, which is generally limited to a maximum \$3,000 reduction in the assessed value of their homes.

Senator Griffo said, “Whenever there’s an emergency, our volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers put their lives on the line each and every day to answer the call, no matter the hour or weather. They are the heroes who often save our lives and property, and expect nothing in return. But because these volunteer men and women selflessly give so

much to our community, we should do what we can to show them how much we appreciate what they do. By allowing these emergency volunteers to receive both a state tax credit and local property tax exemptions, we can reward them for their dedication and encourage new volunteers to join this vital service.”

In addition, a bill ([S1000A](#)) sponsored by Senator Rich Funke (R-C-I, Fairport) would help adequately compensate disabled volunteer firefighters for their service by establishing a cost-of-living adjustment to their state benefits. Under current law, volunteer firefighters who are permanently disabled in the course of their service are eligible to receive workers’ compensation benefits of up to \$400 per week, regardless of the date of their injury. Inflation can make it difficult to subsist on a fixed income, and this legislation would annually adjust benefits by using the Consumer Price Index.

The Senate also passed two bills to broaden educational opportunities for current firefighters. Legislation ([S3126](#)) sponsored by Senator Funke would provide additional incentives for young people to enter volunteer fire service at a time when communities are facing a significant shortage of volunteer firefighters across the state.

This bill would make volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers eligible to receive academic credit after successfully completing a related internship or independent study program. The programs, which would be implemented by State University of New York and community colleges, must include both a service requirement and an academic requirement to ensure that participants are exposed to subject matters such as not-for-profit corporate governance, municipal government, budgeting, and management.

Senator Funke said, “Volunteer firefighters are often the first on scene for many emergencies in Monroe and Ontario counties and across New York State. To help volunteer firefighters answer the call, these bills would attract new recruits through exciting service learning

opportunities, while also ensuring these brave volunteers would be fairly compensated if they are ever hurt on the job. I extend my deepest thanks to all volunteer firefighters who put service above self to keep us safe.”

Another measure (S1473), sponsored by Senator Martin Golden (R-C-I, Brooklyn), would allow firefighters employed by the New York City Fire Department to attend two tuition-free courses at the City University of New York. Currently, New York City Police Department officers who are enrolled in a program leading to a baccalaureate or higher degree receive this benefit, but firefighters do not. By extending the tuition waiver to firefighters, this legislation would enable them to pursue an education early in their careers.

Senator Golden said, "I applaud my colleagues for their support of this legislation that will expand educational opportunities for New York's bravest. This legislation creates a tuition waiver for two courses within the City University of New York system for the men and women of the New York City Fire Department, a recognition of their service and in support of their desire to continue their studies.”

The bills have been sent to the Assembly.

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