



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rich Funke

## Senate Passes Funke Bills to Support Volunteer Firefighters

**RICH FUNKE** June 9, 2015

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The New York State Senate today passed two bills sponsored by Senator Rich Funke to better support volunteer firefighters. The first, S.3126, would make volunteer firefighters eligible for service learning credits at the State University of New York (SUNY) and community colleges, providing added incentives for young people to enter the volunteer fire service. The second, S.1000A, would help adequately compensate disabled volunteer firefighters for their service by establishing a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to their workers compensation benefits.

“Volunteer firefighters are often the first on scene for many emergencies in Monroe and Ontario counties and across New York State,” said Funke. “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.”

Many colleges and universities offer internships and independent study programs to allow students to earn academic credit while obtaining real-life work experience. Under S.3126, the SUNY Board of Trustees would establish standards for new service learning, internship, or independent study programs for active volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers. The

programs, which would be implemented at SUNY and community colleges, must include both a service requirement and an academic requirement. In addition to plying their craft in the volunteer fire service, participants would be exposed to traditional academic subject matters, including not-for-profit corporate governance, municipal government, licensing and permitting, charitable giving, record-keeping, insurance, taxes, budgeting, and management.

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. However, this amount has not changed since 2008 and inflation can often make it difficult to subsist on a fixed income. Bill S.1000A would help compensate disabled volunteer firefighters for their service by annually adjusting State benefits to the Consumer Price Index.

The bills have been sent to the Assembly.