



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara co-sponsors legislation approved by both houses of the Legislature to allow out-of-state firefighters to join local companies ~ O'Mara continues to highlight emergency services volunteer recruitment and retention challenge

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 28, 2016

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**



Elmira, N.Y., June 28—Legislation co-sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) to allow out-of-state firefighters, including seasonal visitors to the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, to volunteer with local fire departments has been approved by the Legislature and now goes to Governor Andrew Cuomo to be signed into law.

The legislation (**S.6609**) would allow local volunteer fire departments to accept out-of-state members as long as their training and experience meets the requirements set by state and local practice.

“Many tourism-based communities and regions get a surge of seasonal residents throughout the summer months,” said O’Mara. “This increased number of residents coincides with a time when local volunteer fire departments are faced with a rise in calls for assistance. The ranks of many of our volunteer departments are already stretched thin – the recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency services personnel remains a huge challenge – and this may be another way to recruit extra help. We have to keep looking for any and every way to help our local department address the challenge of declining numbers of volunteers.”

Under current law, volunteer firefighters must live in the community served by the fire company they want to join. Limited exceptions can be made for volunteers who live nearby, or work in the district, but not, generally, for residents of a different state. Membership would have to be approved by the fire department’s officers, and out-of-state volunteers would not be eligible for length of service awards that are offered by many companies to long-serving volunteers.

The action comes as a new economic impact study released earlier this year by the **Firemen’s Association of New York State (FASNY)** showed that volunteer fire departments save the local communities and local taxpayers they serve more than \$3 billion annually. View the study: **"Tax Savings and Economic Value of Volunteer Firefighters in New York."**

For regional counties, the FASNY study estimates that the property tax increases that would result from moving from volunteer to all-paid fire services would be: Chemung (33.8% increase), Schuyler (36.1%), Steuben (40.3%), Tioga (48%), Tompkins (45.4%) and Yates (33.8%).

O'Mara and his area colleagues in the Assembly, Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) also continue sponsor legislation (**S2780/A4385**) known as the "**Omnibus Emergency Services Volunteer Incentive Act.**"