



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara co-sponsoring 'Community Heroes Protection Act'

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 30, 2017

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**Albany, N.Y., January 30**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today announced that he is co-sponsoring legislation to designate crimes specifically targeting police officers, firefighters and other emergency service workers as hate crimes.

The legislation ([S1114A/A2962A](#)), called the "Community Heroes Protection Act," has bipartisan support in the Legislature. Assemblyman Peter Abbate (D-Brooklyn) sponsors it

in the Assembly.

“We need to stand strong behind the brave men and women putting their lives on the line day in and day out, night after night, protecting our communities and neighborhoods,” said O’Mara. “They are doing their jobs in an increasingly dangerous, hostile and, far too often, deadly environment where they are being targeted for violence simply because of the uniform they wear. It cannot be tolerated.”

There was a 68% increase in firearms-related fatalities among law enforcement between 2015 and 2016, according to research. Sixty-four police officers were fatally shot in 2016. According to the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, approximately 52% of these first responders claimed to have been injured by assault and over 20% said personal safety was their primary concern.

The Community Heroes Protection Act classifies all crimes against first responders, such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services personnel, as hate crimes. These offenses are designated as hate crimes only if they are intentionally aimed at first responders based on the profile of their career. Under current law, when a person is convicted of a hate crime and the specified offense is a misdemeanor or a class C, D or E felony, the hate crime shall be deemed to be one category higher than the specified offense or one category higher than the offense level applicable to the defendant’s conviction. Police officers and first responders are not included in the current definition of a hate crime.

Daniel Sisto Vice President and Legislative Director for the New York State Troopers Police Benevolent Association (PBA), said, "The willingness of individuals to use violence against emergency response personnel has increased in both frequency and severity. A clear message must be sent that this dangerous behavior will not be tolerated. Those that are willing to ignore that message must be held accountable."

Sheriff Timothy Whitcomb, President of the New York State Sheriffs' Association, said, "The past year has been a troubling one for law enforcement and first responders as a whole. As first responders, now more than ever, we must be not only aware and responsive to the needs of our community, but supremely vigilant of our own safety as well. Crimes which specifically target first responders should indeed be given extra scrutiny."

New York State Association of Chiefs of Police President David J. Zack said, "NYSACOP is grateful that the sponsors of the Community Heroes Protection Act are taking the unprecedented attacks against law enforcement seriously, and taking serious action to curb it. Law enforcement officers, correction officers, firefighters, and emergency medical service personnel expose themselves to danger each and every day. Each understood the risk when they took the job. These brave men and women are willing to lay down their lives to protect the lives of others. It is only right that the Legislature and the Governor do all each can to deter those who wish to do these heroes harm based solely on the hatred they possess for those who play such a vital role in our American society. "

Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY) President Kenneth Pienkowski said, "Far too often our members have been targeted by menacing individuals solely because they are firefighters. These despicable and tragic incidents are unfortunately becoming commonplace... Our members are volunteers who accept this job with no pay, little benefits and only a desire to protect their community. How can we possibly ask people to join the ranks of the volunteer community if we cannot give them the most basic protections against malevolent individuals who target them because of what they do? This legislation is vitally important to ensure the protection of our members who risk their lives daily to protect their community."

Jerry DeLuca, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs, said, "The mission of the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs is to educate and train firefighters

and officers, so that they can stay safe while working to protect their communities. The Community Heroes Protection Act goes one step further in helping to ensure the safety of those firefighters, police officers and EMS workers who place their lives in jeopardy for the safety of the public.”