



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## Sen. Helming Hosts Roundtable Discussion with Local Volunteer Firefighters

SENATOR PAM HELMING October 19, 2018

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**



HOPEWELL – Senator Pam Helming brought together more than 50 representatives of volunteer fire departments from throughout the Wayne-Finger Lakes region for her Volunteer Firefighter Summit on Thursday, September 20 at Finger Lakes Community College. Officials from the Fireman’s Association of the State of New York also joined in the discussion, which centered around legislation and funding to support volunteer firefighters as well as issues of concern to volunteer fire departments. According to FASNY, New York’s

nearly 100,000 volunteer firefighters save their local taxpayers around the state more than \$3 billion in firefighting costs by offering their services for free, making them a valuable economic asset in addition to a crucial component of community lifesaving efforts.

“Volunteer firefighters are men and women who leave their homes, families, and jobs to respond to our communities in times of emergency and crisis at all hours of the day and night. No matter what, they drop what they are doing and are there for us when we need them. They also spend countless hours each year attending meetings and trainings to keep their knowledge and skills fresh when it comes to taking care of fires and other emergency situations. They do this all without receiving a paycheck and without expecting anything in return, which is why I am proud to be an advocate in the State Senate for our volunteer fire departments and why I felt it was so important to hold an event such as my Volunteer Firefighter Summit. It was terrific to bring together our volunteer firefighters from across our region to listen to their ideas and concerns as well as provide them with the services and resources they need to continue their critical role in our communities. Our communities are grateful for our volunteer fire departments, and I will continue to do all that I can to support our volunteer firefighters,” Senator Helming said.

One of the notable topics discussed was priority legislation signed into law last year that provides coverage for volunteer firefighters who develop cancer as a result of their duties. FASNY Board of Directors member Mike Caron spoke about the legislation that Senator Helming co-sponsored and FASNY’s efforts to keep the costs of the coverage down for volunteer fire departments as the legislation is implemented. FASNY also encouraged members to submit surveys for a first-of-its-kind cancer study in volunteer fire service that will help the medical community design effective cancer prevention, treatment, and screening programs for volunteer firefighters.

Next, a representative from Senator Helming's Albany Office spoke about the grant and funding opportunities available to volunteer fire departments. This includes federal and state money as well as other sources.

Cheshire Fire Department Chief Michael Northrup led an interactive discussion with all participants on the challenges associated with volunteer recruitment and retention, such as a generational shift, decreasing population, and increasing training requirements. The group suggested possible solutions to recruit new volunteer firefighters, such as departments engaging their communities through non-fire events and community service, such as 5K races and helping out at other events. Chief Northrup also noted a successful incentive program used by his department that other departments may want to use.

As a result of the discussion, Senator Helming will introduce legislation that requires the Office of Fire Prevention and Control to conduct a study on the minimum recommended qualifications to become a volunteer firefighters as well as legislation to provide a tax credit for volunteer firefighters who complete qualifications to become a training instructor.