



PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 5, 2024

Contact: Seth Squicciarino
Phone: (631) 341-7111 EXT: 1050
Email: squiccia@nysenate.gov

Legislation Expanding Retirement Benefits for Suffolk First Responders Signed

Sen. Monica R. Martinez's initiative addresses paid EMS staffing shortages and supports recruitment with a 25-year retirement option.

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. – Suffolk first responders may soon have the option to retire after 25 years of service, following the signing of New York State Sen. Monica R. Martinez's [legislation](#) allowing service districts to elect to include certain EMS personnel in this pension plan. The move is seen as a way to address potentially critical staffing shortages among paid emergency service workers.

Originally approved in 2023, the [plan](#) could not move forward without a companion bill outlining a clear mechanism for fire districts to opt in. Gov. Kathy Hochul's signing of the new measure now establishes that process.

"Serving your community as a first responder is often difficult and dangerous work," said Sen. Martinez. "Allowing this pension plan for EMS providers is a recognition of the challenges these professionals face and the hardships this line of work imposes on them both physically and financially."

Under Sen. Martinez's amendment, paid emergency medical technicians, critical care technicians, advanced emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and their supervisors will be allowed to retire with pension benefits from the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System after 25 years of creditable service. Paid service as a firefighter or officer of any organized fire agency will also count toward the creditable service required for retirement. The change will only impact members within districts that are currently enrolled in the retirement system and that choose to expand participation to the additional EMS-related titles.

[MORE]

Medical first responders are subject to unique challenges due to the nature of their work which can result in job-related injuries or cumulative physical stresses that can limit their ability to work beyond a certain point in their careers. To ensure these lifesavers' financial security during retirement and mitigate the financial burdens associated with potential disabilities or injuries, this pension update will ensure a reliable and stable income source should the member not be able to serve until the previous minimum age and longevity to qualify for retirement.

In addition to assisting current employees, it is anticipated the change will attract new members, who share a passion for helping others but haven't been incentivized to make a career change.

According to a 2023 [report](#) issued by the State Emergency Medical Services Council, "The number of certified EMS personnel declined from about 80,000 to about 70,000 between 2019 and 2021, a decrease of approximately 13%." The report goes on to say that less than half of these 70,000 certified providers were working in EMS making the reality even worse than it is on paper.

Recruitment of first responders, both paid and volunteer, has struggled statewide for decades. Earlier this year, the Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY) [reported](#) volunteer firefighter ranks across the state have fallen by 33% over the past 20 years. The state's ambulance providers [face similar challenges](#), with longer wait times, a shortage of volunteers, and funding shortfalls putting the emergency medical services system into crisis.

The 25 year retirement option is one of several initiatives led by Sen. Martinez this session to support fire and emergency medical volunteers and drive recruitment. Martinez's bills also include:

- Increasing the volunteer firefighter and ambulance member income tax credit from \$200 to \$800 for individuals and from \$400 to \$1,600 for joint filers ([S7286A](#)).
- Allowing volunteers who live in one service district but volunteer in another to claim the same property tax credits as those serving within the jurisdiction where they reside ([S2862A](#)).
- Creating a "Vets to VOLLIES"/Veterans to Volunteers program ([S8111](#)).
- Ensuring the timely payment of death benefits for volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers ([S4711](#)).