

**JOINT BUDGET HEARING
FY2026 NYS EXECUTIVE BUDGET
PUBLIC PROTECTION**

Written Testimony Submission

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FASNY is the voice of New York State's 80,000 volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers. It is an honor and privilege to offer testimony for your consideration on behalf of the volunteer first responders of this great state, all of whom are grateful for your collective partnership and all that you do here in the Legislature to keep New Yorkers safe.

FASNY has informed, educated, and trained the volunteer fire service since 1872 and advocates for New York's volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers in both Albany and on the national level, working hand in hand with elected representatives to enact critical legislation to protect communities and first responders.

We offer this testimony to lend our voice to the important conversations taking place on matters affecting public safety and specifically volunteer firefighters and ambulance personnel in this year's budget.

Today's volunteer firefighters undergo 120 hours of formal basic training, plus in-house and on-the-job training. We are very grateful to the Governor for her leadership in once again including training stipends to support new volunteers in the Executive Budget and we thank both houses for their support of this initiative over the last two years. These stipends help offset the significant time investment our newest firefighters make in their training.

The growth of our state and advances in firefighting require departments to make ongoing investments to assure we have the latest technology, apparatus and facilities to properly protect our neighbors. For the last two years, the Legislature and the Executive have worked together to fund the V-FIRE grant program, providing critical assistance on this front. It is in the budget again this year, a sign of ongoing support that we are very grateful for.

As the world around us has evolved, firefighters face additional risks from modern products giving off more hazardous smoke and toxic by-products when burned than the legacy home furnishings like wool, cotton and wood couch versus today's petroleum-based synthetic furniture. The State worked with us to provide volunteer firefighters access to presumptive Enhanced Cancer Disability coverage, a program that has helped many volunteer firefighters and their families as they've battled cancer over the last eight years.

We've learned our lifesaving personal protective equipment or bunker gear, made to protect us from heat, toxins and other physical dangers, contains PFAS - a forever chemical linked to cancer. Imagine the irony of a firefighter's protective gear exposing them to a known carcinogen? The Legislature has held hearings on this topic, and we appreciate your vigilance on this important issue. The Governor has proposed banning the sale of gear containing PFAS and it is critically important to FASNY and our members in the field that both houses will support this important policy in the final budget.

This budget has many mentions of helping New Yorkers keep up with the rising cost of living - but not for first responders. FASNY completed an economic [study](#) in 2023, which found the volunteer fire service in this state saves taxpayers \$4.7 billion annually. This tremendous cost savings warrants a better benefit for our members. With recruitment and retention being an existential problem for both volunteer fire and EMS, increasing the Volunteer Firefighter income tax credit would be a meaningful tool to getting new recruits, and keeping experienced ones.

While improvements in structural safety have caused fires to decline, calls for EMS continue to steadily climb across New York State, partially due to our state's aging population and strained healthcare system. Many fire departments respond to far more medical emergencies than fires or fire alarms. The Legislature and the Governor have prioritized establishing EMS as an Essential Service. We are so grateful for your support of EMS and look forward to continuing to work together to advance our state's emergency medical response. We also

look forward to working with both houses to make the law allowing EMS Cost Recovery by fire-based ambulances permanent. This is key to sustaining and improving our ability to deliver EMS care.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. FASNY looks forward to our continued partnership in service of the residents and first responders of this state.