



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeremy A. Cooney

## During National EMS Week, Senator Cooney, Senator Rhoads Unveil Bipartisan Plan to Recruit Emergency Service Volunteers in New York State

JEREMY A. COONEY May 24, 2024

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**



Senators' Bill Would Provide Free State Tuition to Active Emergency Service Volunteers

(ALBANY, NY) - Today, **Senator Jeremy Cooney (D-Rochester)**, **Senator Steven Rhoads (R-Bellmore)**, and a bipartisan group of legislators outlined their plan to boost recruitment of emergency service volunteers in New York. The Senators explained that their bill ([S9033](#)) would provide free SUNY, CUNY, or community college tuition to active volunteer

firefighters, volunteer EMS providers, and volunteer auxiliary police officers.

The Senators explained that the benefits of the bill would be twofold. First, the free tuition would provide an incentive for those interested in college to fill these much-needed volunteer positions, and second, those already dedicating their free time to serve their communities in these positions would be rewarded for their service. The Senators' bill would create a statewide program to administer these benefits, and they would only apply to those actively volunteering.

**Senator Cooney** said, "New Yorkers rely on the selfless commitment of volunteer first responders to keep their communities safe. With this bill, we have the opportunity to both recruit more volunteers to these positions, and reward those already performing this life-saving work. I'm proud to join my colleagues in showing our thanks to these heroes, and showing our state that making college affordable and serving the community can go hand in hand."

**Senator Rhoads** said, "In many areas across our state, our volunteer first responders are the lifeblood of our communities, putting their lives at risk to protect the lives and property of their neighbors in their time of need. This bipartisan legislation is a small token of our immense gratitude for their tireless efforts and sacrifices. By providing free SUNY, CUNY, and community college tuition to active volunteer firefighters, volunteer emergency medical services providers, and volunteer auxiliary police officers we are empowering them to pursue their educational goals and build brighter futures. This bill is also a powerful recruitment and retention tool to help address staffing shortages. With cost of living on the rise, many are put off or are forced to leave volunteer service to pick up a second job to pay for their education. This will allow them the time and resources to continue their vital work while achieving their educational goals. As a volunteer firefighter for over 30 years myself, I know firsthand that this bill will be a game-changer allowing us to attract and retain the best and

brightest individuals, who will continue to serve our communities with distinction.”

**Senator Martinez** said, “Providing the opportunity for our volunteer firefighters, EMS providers, and auxiliary police officers to receive a free public undergraduate education supports the goals of the RecruitNY and Rescue EMS reforms. This measure will strengthen our communities by assisting those who protect and save lives every day while providing critical incentives, which will address retention and recruitment efforts. Thank you, Senators Cooney and Rhoads, for honoring the service of these first responder volunteers and working to prevent the current recruitment challenges from becoming critical.”

"Volunteer recruitment and retention is critical to the fire service across our state, as well as the citizens and communities we serve," said **Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY) President Edward Tase, Jr.** "Our 80,000 volunteer firefighters save New Yorkers almost \$4 billion annually in additional local property taxes through their unpaid service to their communities. To continue providing our lifesaving services - and the related economic benefits of local cost savings, we need to embrace new and creative ways to attract and retain volunteers. Providing free tuition to all SUNY, CUNY and community colleges across the state is an excellent example of this creative and cost-efficient approach to the challenges we face with recruitment and retention. FASNY and the entire volunteer fire service want to thank Senators Cooney and Rhoads and their colleagues for their leadership on this important piece of legislation."

“The New York State Volunteer Ambulance and Rescue Association (NYSVARA) is pleased to endorse S9033 that would provide free SUNY, CUNY, and community college tuition to active volunteer first responders and we look forward to working with Senators Cooney and Rhoads to enact this groundbreaking legislation,” said **NYSVARA Legislative Committee Chair Steven Kroll**. “EMS staffing in New York State is in crisis and the shrinking number of EMTs and Paramedics is insufficient to meet the needs of communities and is a threat to public

health. Data from the NYS Department of Health shows that the number of active and certified EMS personnel declined by 17% between 2019 and 2022. Many EMS services cannot staff the necessary number of ambulances, resulting in delays in both emergency and non-emergency responses. With EMS agencies forced to rely on an undersized workforce, EMTs and Paramedics feel the stress of the increased workload. We thank Senators Cooney and Rhoads for authoring this bill that would incentivize many New Yorkers to become volunteer first responders in their communities.”

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