



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

## **Winner, Bacalles seek assist for Steuben County volunteers**

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**Corning, N.Y.**---State Senator George Winner (R-C-I, Elmira) and Assemblyman Jim Bacalles (R-C-I, Corning) have introduced legislation aimed at helping Steuben

County recruit and retain emergency services volunteers.

In a joint statement, Winner and Bacalles said, "Steuben County continues to experience a shortage of volunteer firefighters and EMTs. It is critical to the well-being of our communities to address this shortage. We're hopeful that this legislation could help to attract and retain badly needed volunteers. These volunteers save lives, protect property, and provide essential services that otherwise would impose a huge financial burden on local governments. They deserve our strong support. State and local governments should recognize and reward the critical role emergency services volunteers play in our communities."

In 2002, the state Legislature authorized Steuben County to provide a real property tax exemption on the primary residence of a volunteer firefighter or ambulance worker with at least five years of service.

The new Winner-Bacalles measure, originally introduced at the request of the Steuben County Legislature, would increase the current maximum level of the exemption from \$3,000 to \$5,000, and decrease the number of service years required for a volunteer to be eligible for the exemption from five to two years.

Winner is also [sponsoring legislation with Assemblyman Tom O'Mara](#) (R-Horseheads) to help localities fend off potentially enormous future local property tax increases by offering incentives to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters and other emergency services personnel.

The [Firemen's Association of the State of New York](#) (FASNY) estimates that it would cost local taxpayers more than \$5 billion annually to replace volunteers with paid fire and ambulance services. According to FASNY, the number of volunteer firefighters statewide has declined from 140,000 in the early 1990s to fewer than 90,000 today. Volunteer emergency medical technicians (EMTs) experienced a decline from more than 50,000 to 35,000 during the same period, with some rural counties experiencing as much as a 50-percent depletion of their EMT ranks.