



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

Legislation Approved to Encourage Volunteer Recruitment

GEORGE WINNER September 11, 2009

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Albany, N.Y., September 11—The New York State Senate gave final legislative approval today to legislation, supported by state Senator George Winner (R-C-I, Elmira), to create a “Volunteer Emergency Services Recruitment and Retention Fund” by allowing taxpayers to voluntarily contribute to the fund’s establishment through a state income tax check-off.

Supporters of the measure said that programs like this one to allow taxpayers to voluntarily “check off” a contribution to state programs on a state personal income tax form have grown

in popularity across the nation over the last decade. New York currently has a check-off program to support wildlife conservation, child abuse prevention, and breast cancer research and treatment, among others.

The new fund (S.4982/A.2733), which was approved by the Assembly earlier this year, would provide grants to volunteer emergency services organizations to support their recruitment and retention initiatives. It must be approved by Governor David Paterson before becoming law.

Winner, who has long supported and sponsored legislation 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, said that the new fund could prove to be a worthwhile addition to the overall effort to bolster the ranks of emergency services volunteers statewide.

“We need to consider any and every possible way to address this challenge,” said Winner.

“The issue of volunteer recruitment and retention warns of the next explosive property tax crisis facing localities across New York. We need to keep sounding the alarm, and we need to keep looking for answers. It would cost billions of dollars for local property taxpayers to pay for the critical services currently provided by volunteer firefighters and EMTs.”

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.

Winner and state Assemblyman Tom O'Mara (R-Horseheads) said that they will continue to introduce and sponsor legislation known as the "Emergency Services Volunteer Incentive Act." The Winner-O'Mara legislation (S.3983/A.7678) would:

- provide a \$400 state income tax credit for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers who have been active for four or more consecutive years;
- exempt motor vehicles owned and used in the performance of duty by an emergency services volunteer from motor vehicle registration fees and vehicle use taxes;
- authorize local volunteer fire and ambulance companies to use state-administered funds, collected annually through a two-percent fire insurance premium tax on out-of-state insurers, to help offset the cost of health insurance for their members;
- increase the number of qualified candidates, from one to three, that volunteer companies can submit for participation in New York's "Volunteer Recruitment Service Scholarships" program, a college tuition assistance program for volunteers created by state lawmakers in 2002; and
- direct the state Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) to create a volunteer recruitment service college loan forgiveness program.