



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Bill to Aid Search, Rescue Teams

PATTY RITCHIE June 17, 2011

| ISSUE: **HEALTH, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

Inspired By Oswego County Search and Rescue Team

State Senator Patty Ritchie says her bill to provide training and certification for specialized search and rescue teams, inspired by Oswego County's Search and Rescue Team, will enhance emergency service capabilities across upstate New York.

"Every year emergency personnel across the state are called out to help search for people who are lost in wilderness areas as well as neighborhoods," Senator Ritchie said. "It's been established that the same skills and courses developed by our state's forest rangers to search for people lost in wilderness areas can dramatically improve the success of searches anywhere else. This legislation will encourage emergency personnel to obtain the additional training that's available that would help them be more effective when someone turns up missing."

"Across the state, we're also seeing cases where individuals suffering from dementia or developmental disabilities wander off from caregivers," Senator Ritchie said. "Helping emergency personnel develop expertise in search management, national incident command system (ICS), map, compass, search techniques, and the use of global positioning system (GPS) units will encourage volunteer emergency service personnel to develop specialized

search and rescue teams that can be deployed when emergencies arise.”

“What this bill does is recognize the contributions that search and rescue teams have made for the past 40 years and continue to make,” said Roger Fox, chairman of the New York State Federation of Search and Rescue Teams. “Ultimately it is going to benefit lost and missing people in New York state. If we can save just one life with this bill, it’s worth it.”

In the past 11 years since the Oswego County Search and Rescue team has been integrated into lost/missing persons incident response by local emergency services, not a single death has occurred as a result of an individual not being located in a timely manner by the Search and Rescue team (prior to then, at least 1-2 deaths a year were reported in the county due to lost/missing persons succumbing to the environment- i.e. not being found in time).

The law would allow for the establishment of standardized training and credentials for volunteer search and rescue groups so that these groups are encouraged to organize and participate in search and rescue operations. The development of specialized search and rescue groups will benefit the public by providing additional resources to respond in emergencies where lost or missing persons are in need of assistance.

Standardized training will help ensure that volunteer search and rescue efforts are conducted in a safe and effective manner. Well trained volunteer search and rescue groups are very important since the Department of Environmental Conservation’s Rangers have limited resources and must conduct approximately 300 search and rescue efforts per year in wild remote and forested areas of the state.