



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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July 26, 2011

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Getting it Right for our Volunteers

The summer is here, the senate is out of session, and I've been able to spend more time in the communities of the Seventh Senate District, meeting with local residents and hearing what's on their minds.

A common theme is concern for the volunteers that serve our neighborhoods. Here in Nassau County we are blessed with many who offer their time as firefighters, emergency service workers and auxiliary police officers for the benefit of our residents and businesses. Enough thanks cannot be given to these good men and

women but beyond gratitude we must resolve issues that will negatively impact how they serve us. As chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Local Government and a former mayor, I am particularly aware of aspects that may go overlooked.

This year we tackled important issues affecting our emergency service volunteers and, consequently, all of us who rely on them each and every day. From legislation authorizing blue lights on ambulances and EMS vehicles to amendments to Safety Rope legislation, we took steps to protect our community volunteers – to put our first responders first.

This session, I sponsored legislation that will help keep our emergency personnel safer. The bill, signed into law by Governor Cuomo, calls for blue lights to be installed on the back of ambulances. Studies show that blue lights are more easily distinguished at night and will enhance the safety of our emergency service workers by including ambulances and EMS vehicles in the definition of a highway emergency incident safety zone.

I have also worked with my colleagues to amend the "safety ropes" law in order to provide firefighters with appropriate equipment and procedures for above grade floors in structure fires. Although well intentioned, the current law presents a number of challenges to our local volunteer fire companies. The fact is that each fire department should be able to evaluate the appropriate equipment necessary to combat fires given the needs and particulars of each community. The blanket requirement that all fire departments purchase and use this equipment has placed an undue burden on our local departments that must somehow bear the cost of the equipment even in instances when its use is not warranted or even dangerous. The bill passed the Senate, but, unfortunately, did not make it out of the Assembly. I will continue to work with the various firematic associations and my colleagues in the Assembly in hopes of getting this common-sense issue resolved.

As we know, in 2009, a law was enacted empowering citizens to dissolve local governments and special districts, including fire districts. Unfortunately the legislation made it too easy to do away with those districts without first knowing the impact to the community. Did you know that, as it stands, a petition can be circulated forcing a referendum vote on whether to dissolve a fire district without details as to who will pick up the fire services or whether it would even be more cost effective? It sounds absurd but it's true. It was not well thought out and is, quite frankly, dangerous.

We all want lower taxes and our fight for government efficiency has just begun, but a knee-jerk reaction will put people and property in harm's way. People have a right to an informed vote. It's common sense. That's why shortly after taking office I sponsored a bill to amend the law, telling citizens exactly what the alternative plan would be and how much it would cost them before they are asked to vote. It passed the Senate, but again, despite the best efforts of my colleague, Michelle Schimel, got held up in the Assembly. I will continue to fight for it in this coming session.

The quality of life on Long Island is greatly shaped by our volunteer emergency personnel. They always tell me they are honored to serve and I want them to know that I am equally honored to serve them. Please, take a moment to say thank you and to let them know that we are committed to getting things right for them.