



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Release: Addabbo Joins with Senate Colleagues in Passing Bills to Aid Volunteer Firefighters and Ambulance Workers

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR. June 22, 2015

Queens, NY (June 22, 2015) In recognition of the extraordinary public service provided by members of volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies, NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. recently joined with his Senate colleagues in passing legislation to help these volunteers save money on taxes, receive greater and improved timely benefits, and gain access to new educational opportunities.

Having five volunteer fire departments in his district, Addabbo noted, "Night and day, 365 days a year, our volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies stand ready, willing and able to respond to emergencies and save the lives of others, often while putting their own health and safety at risk." He added, "Volunteerism is a vital and welcome calling in our communities, and it is fitting that we take steps to assist and recognize the efforts of our volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies as they give selflessly of themselves to all of us."

The package of legislation recently approved by the State Senate to aid volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies is as follows:

S.1000, which is co-sponsored by Addabbo, would provide for an automatic annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to disability benefits received by volunteer firefighters. In 1998,

the State Legislature raised the benefit level for firefighters with permanent total disabilities to a maximum of \$400 a week regardless of their date of injury, and this bill seeks to address inflation and aid disabled firefighters who are struggling to live on fixed incomes.

S.2727 would allow volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers to receive both personal income tax credits of up to \$200 and real property tax exemptions of up to \$3000 off the assessed value of their homes. In recent years, both the state and local governments have offered tax incentives for the express purpose of promoting volunteerism in the emergency services field, but volunteers have had to choose between personal income tax benefits or real property tax breaks. This legislation would make volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers eligible for both programs.

S.3126 would require the state university trustees to develop guidelines for a service learning, internship or independent study program to enable budding volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers to get academic credit for their activities through SUNY schools and community colleges. By combining community service and academic learning, the new program would help to encourage greater volunteerism, particularly among college students who might not otherwise have the time or opportunity to join a volunteer fire or ambulance company.

S.888 would require that death benefits provided to the surviving beneficiary of a volunteer firefighter or ambulance worker who died in the line of duty be paid out within 90 days of the filing of the benefits application. This will allow adequate time to determine the facts of the injury or death and would help to ensure that claims are processed more expeditiously. In one known case, a benefits claim for a widow took two and a half years to come through, and she came close to losing her home.

S.4149 would extend a law affecting volunteer firefighters which creates a presumption that certain lung diseases leading to their disability or death of the firefighters were incurred in the performance of their duties. The bill extends this law, initially enacted in 2006, through June 30, 2020.

“This package of legislation addresses a number of issues that matter to our volunteer firefighters and ambulance squad members,” said Addabbo. “By creating incentives for volunteerism – whether through tax breaks or new learning opportunities – we will be able to build a more robust network of dedicated men and women who unselfishly give of their time and talents to serve others in their times of greatest need. In addition, by helping to ensure adequate benefits for volunteer first responders who are injured or killed in the line of duty, we are showing respect for the most vital needs of some of our most dedicated community volunteers and their families. I thank all vollies for their efforts to secure the safety, health and well being of others.”

The bill extending the law affecting lung disease benefits for firefighters has been approved by the Senate and the Assembly, and will soon go to the Governor for his consideration. The other bills, having passed the Senate, are under consideration by several different Assembly committees.