



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Bill to Strengthen Local Fire Departments Signed into Law

PATTY RITCHIE December 27, 2018



State Senator Patty Ritchie's bill to help local volunteer fire department members complete certain training requirements either closer to home or online has been signed into law.

"Local fire departments are already dealing with the stresses that come with staffing and equipment concerns. If they have to send a member, or members, and other resources to training events out of the area, their ability to protect their communities becomes even more limited," Senator Ritchie said. "This law ensures departments are able to serve their communities, as well as makes it easier for members and new volunteers to receive the training they need."

Sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblymember Monica Wallace, the bipartisan bill (S.7373C) directs the commissioner of the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to develop a plan that would allow more skills training requirements to be completed at a trainee's home department or online.

The idea for the bill was raised by volunteer firefighters at the Louisville Volunteer Fire Department in St. Lawrence County during a recent visit by Senator Ritchie to the department. In addition to making it easier for volunteers to receive necessary training, the law is also seen as a way to incentivize individuals weighing the decision whether to join a local volunteer fire department.

"Many of our volunteers are balancing full time jobs, time with family and other obligations," said Louisville Volunteer Fire Department Chief Pete Roberts. "By allowing them to complete certain training online, or at the trainee's home department, we are making it easier for them to be part of the effort to protect their community from harm. We would like to thank Senator Ritchie for her support of this measure, and of the important work volunteer firefighters across New York State do each and every day."

According to a recent economic impact report from the Fireman's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), there are nearly 100,000 volunteer firefighters in New York. The report states that volunteer firefighters save New York State more than \$3 billion annually, when compared to what it would cost to maintain an all-paid fire service in the state. The report does not take into account the expense of hiring and equipping such a service, nor does it include the inevitable rise in property taxes that would result.