



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara reminds area residents of upcoming 'RECRUIT NY' initiative on April 27-28: Statewide campaign focuses on challenge of recruiting volunteer firefighters

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 22, 2019

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**



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Elmira, N.Y., April 22—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today reminded area residents that the **Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY)** will conduct its

annual “RecruitNY” campaign this weekend, an annual public awareness initiative sponsored by the association to encourage the recruitment and retention of local volunteer firefighters and EMTs.

This year’s RecruitNY campaign is scheduled for April 27-28, 2019. Throughout the weekend volunteer fire departments across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide, will conduct Open Houses and invite the public to come and learn more about becoming a volunteer firefighter.

For a county-by-county list of fire departments locally and statewide currently scheduled to hold a RecruitNY Open House, visit FASNY’s website [HERE](#).

"The challenge of recruiting volunteer firefighters and EMTs, especially in our rural, upstate communities, deserves all of the attention it gets. Keeping our corps of emergency services volunteers strong has to be a statewide priority. Our volunteer fire departments have long been the foundation of public safety and security, and the center of community service and civic pride, and we can't risk their decline," said O'Mara. "It's a challenge that we need to keep working on and raising awareness about because in addition to the safety and well-being of our communities, the economic impact of volunteer emergency services is enormous. RecruitNY sounds the alarm and accomplishes these goals very effectively."

According to FASNY, the number of volunteer firefighters statewide declined from 140,000 in the early 1990s to less than 90,000 just a few years ago. 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. But FASNY notes that RecruitNY and other initiatives are beginning to make a difference and approximately 20,000 firefighters have been added to the ranks of departments statewide over the past few years.

O'Mara, together with local state Assemblymen Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) continues to sponsor legislation (**S.939/A.4239**), known as the “Omnibus Emergency Services Volunteer Incentive Act,” to provide a series of tax and other incentives to help address the recruitment and retention challenge. They point to their legislation as part of ongoing state-level efforts by FASNY and others to keep drawing attention to a challenge that many believe poses a property tax crisis in waiting and other crises for many rural, upstate communities.

A 2016 FASNY study, **“Tax Savings and Economic Value of Volunteer Firefighters in New York,”** found that the state’s 100,000 volunteer firefighters save taxpayers more than \$3 billion annually. Specific findings include that:

- > an additional 30,822 career firefighters would be necessary to convert to an all-paid service statewide;
- > the annual cost of an all-career service would be \$3.87 billion;
- > there would be a one-time cost of \$5.95 billion to acquire existing stations/structures, vehicles and equipment -- approximately 1,300 stations would have to be built new or reconstructed; and
- > property taxes statewide would rise between 3.3% and 123%, with an average increase of 26.5%.

The FASNY report notes, “New York State as a whole relies heavily on volunteer fire departments. Of its 1,795 municipal fire departments, 89% are volunteer. Volunteer firefighters are most prevalent in smaller, suburban and rural communities that have a lesser tax base than larger towns and cities. That these communities rely on volunteers testifies to cost savings from volunteer departments, and conversion to paid departments

would be a particular burden for these localities.”

For regional counties, the FASNY study estimates that the property tax increases that would result from moving from volunteer to all-paid fire fire services would be: Chemung (33.8% increase), Schuyler (36.1%), Steuben (40.3%), Tioga (48%), Tompkins (45.4%) and Yates (33.8%).