



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Senator Helming Bill to Boost Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment Passes State Senate

PAMELA HELMING June 2, 2021

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The New York State Senate has unanimously passed [Senate bill S.2596](#), authored and sponsored by Senator Pam Helming, to help recruit more volunteer firefighters across the state. Under the legislation, local fire departments with youth training programs can allow student volunteers to safely observe an active emergency or hazardous response.

“In my discussions with our local fire departments, there has been a constant refrain: We need more volunteers. One idea we came up with to support recruitment was to give student volunteers the opportunity to experience firsthand how firefighters respond to emergencies. This will give our young people greater awareness and education about the opportunities available in the volunteer fire service, which is one of the best ways they can serve and support their communities. I am proud to sponsor this bill and to work with our local fire departments and first responders on initiatives like this to boost recruitment,” said **Senator Pam Helming**.

Current law prohibits student volunteers from observing an active emergency. Senator Helming’s bill will allow observation of an active emergency under requirements established and regulated by the local fire chief.

“Over the past several years, volunteerism has been on a steady decline. This decline has put an additional stress on an already aging group of first responders. The key to turning this around is the youth in our community – they are the future of the fire service. Senator Helming sees this vision, and we commend her for trying to encourage our youth to step up and play an active part in protecting and supporting their communities. By allowing students to witness live emergency scenes, Senator Helming’s bill will help further engage our youth, and further their dedication to public service. Actions like this will hopefully bring about the change that is greatly needed in the fire service,” said **Adam Weinstein, Chief, Macedon Center Fire Department**.

“Volunteer firefighters are the fabric of our community. I welcome the opportunities this bill creates for young people and I am grateful for Senator Helming’s continued support of first responders,” said **Jason Wagner, Chief, Shortsville Fire Department**.

“Once again, Senator Helming has demonstrated her leadership and forward thinking by proposing this important legislation. Updating laws in an effort to improve volunteerism is an important step in the right direction. We thank her for her efforts on this,” said **George Bastedo, Director, Wayne County Emergency Management.**

“We are grateful for Senator Helming’s sponsorship of this legislation. Over the past several years, we have seen a decrease in the number of volunteer firefighters and it has been one of our foremost public safety concerns. Giving student volunteers this firsthand experience is a great way to get them involved and I am very excited to see how this new legislation will help increase membership, strengthening our fire departments,” said **Melissa Taylor, Director, Seneca County Office of Emergency Management.**

“On behalf of the entire Cheshire Volunteer Fire Department, I applaud Senator Helming’s efforts to strengthen our abilities to recruit today’s youth into the volunteer fire service. Along with Senator Helming’s Volunteer Fire Service forums, this bill is further evidence of Senator Helming’s tireless energies on behalf of all first responders,” said **Chris Brown, Chief, Cheshire Volunteer Fire Department.**

“Over the past 10 years, the number of new volunteer firefighters and EMS providers has dropped significantly across the nation. This is an especially more difficult situation in rural areas that could not afford a paid fire department. Engaging young people early, through active involvement and firsthand exposure to real-life emergencies, should help bolster our volunteer capacity, and also serve to open doors to a career path in public safety. Providing safe, guided, on-scene exposure to real world incidents will provide a rare opportunity for reinforcing what they learn in their formal training. The sooner we get young people actively involved, the better our chances of having the trained and capable emergency resources our communities so badly need,” said **Dale A. Currier, Director, Cayuga County Office of Emergency Services.**

“We are very thankful for the continued efforts of Senator Helming. This legislation is important for the recruitment and retention of current and future volunteer firefighters,” said **Ed Kaspar, Chief, West Webster Fire District**.

“Volunteerism is in a critical position right now. The steady decline, and lack of emphasis on volunteering for your community as it relates to the fire service, is directly impacting fire rescue responses across our area. It is imperative that ‘we as the fire service’ stand with our Senator as she tries to help us bring our youth into the rewarding professional volunteer firefighting profession. This added measure can go a long way in bringing in new youth to bridge the gap of the youth and aging volunteer firefighters. This new legislation will increase the perception of the need, and provide further understanding to our younger community members of what we do, why we do it, and how they can serve their community in a positive way. The Clyde Fire Department greatly appreciates Senator Helming’s continued efforts to support the first responder community as a whole. We are truly grateful,” said **Joseph Tavano Jr., District Fire Chief, Clyde Fire Department**.

The bill has now been sent to the Assembly.

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