

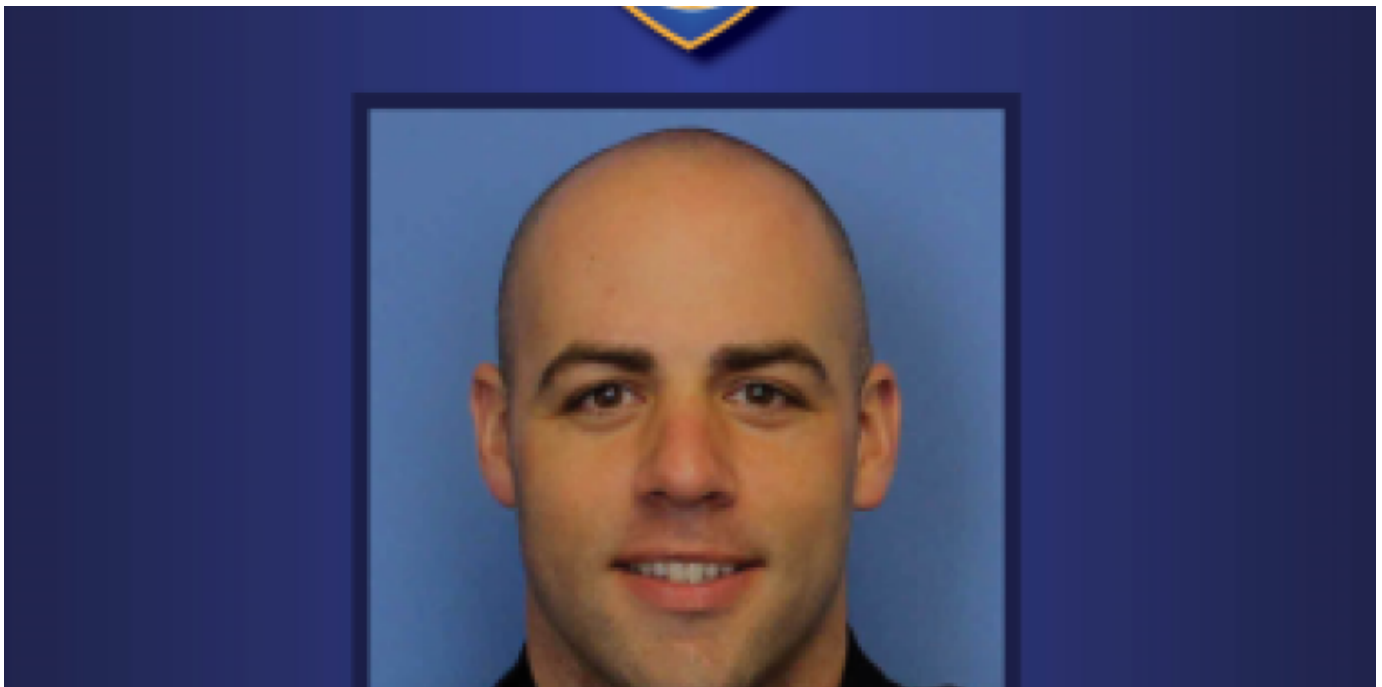


NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
Patrick M. Gallivan

The Death of a Buffalo Firefighter Reminds Us How Important First Responders Are to the Community

PATRICK GALLIVAN March 24, 2023

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The tragic death of a Buffalo Firefighter while battling a 4-alarm blaze on March 1 is a stark reminder of the dangers these brave men and women face every day. Jason Arno made the ultimate sacrifice while serving his community in a job his family and friends say he loved. Jason was a husband, a father, a son, a brother and a hero.

We are all familiar with the saying ‘firefighters run in when everyone else runs out.’ We heard that a lot after the events of 9-11. It often comes to mind when tragedy strikes, but it is important that we remember firefighters and others first responders display this sense of duty and dedication every day, all across New York State. We must never take it for granted.

While Buffalo and some larger municipalities rely on the services of paid professionals, smaller communities depend on volunteers to help keep residents safe. Citizens undergo special training, help maintain equipment and, most importantly, stand ready to respond to fires, accidents, medical emergencies and other calls for help. It truly is an act of neighbor helping neighbor. In addition to the vital services these men and women provide, they save New York taxpayers millions of dollars per year.

Unfortunately, many volunteer fire departments are facing difficulty in attracting and retaining members. I have met with fire chiefs from across the region and the state who say the number of volunteers has been dwindling for years, and those who remain are getting older. Locally, the Blasdell Fire Department is so short on volunteers, it is unable to respond to calls. The village is asking neighboring fire companies for help.

There is no easy solution to the volunteer crisis, but there are things the state can do. I am co-sponsoring several bills in the NYS Senate to help attract firefighters.

The first would provide a state income tax exemption for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers who meet certain service requirements, including proper certification, training and a dedicated level of response. A second bill would provide a mileage reimbursement tax credit for those volunteers who use their personal vehicles to respond to emergencies or to fulfill their duties.

The state can also provide an incentive to employers who hire and retain workers who are volunteer first responders. A third bill would provide a wage tax credit to businesses that employ volunteer firefighters, EMS personnel, NY National Guard members and reservists.

Beyond legislation, the state must also ensure fire departments have the resources necessary to keep our communities safe. I urge my colleagues to support these proposals and to provide adequate funding for fire services across the state.

As our community continues to mourn the death of Firefighter Arno, we should also take a moment to honor his thousands of brother and sister firefighters across New York State who put their lives on the line every time the alarm rings. We thank them for their service and dedication.