



PRESS RELEASE
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Answering the Call: State Legislature Takes Up Multiple Bills Supporting Volunteer Firefighters and EMS Members This Session

On National Volunteer Firefighters Recognition Day, Sen. Martinez spotlights recent first-responder policy improvements advanced in Albany

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. – Today is National Volunteer Firefighters Recognition Day, a time to honor the courageous and selfless individuals who risk their lives to keep our communities safe. In recognition of their service, New York State Sen. Monica R. Martinez is highlighting key legislative initiatives introduced during this session, including several she sponsored, that support and strengthen volunteer first responders across the state.

Key legislation included in the enacted budget:

- **EMS Cost Recovery:** Extends authorization for fire departments and companies to establish EMS user fees for five more years, now expiring in April 2031, enabling continued cost recovery and financial stability for emergency services.
- **Firefighter Equipment PFAS Ban:** Prohibits PFAS chemicals in firefighters' personal protective equipment beginning in 2028 and requires environmentally sound disposal of existing gear to protect both responders and the environment.
- **Volunteer Firefighter Infrastructure Response Equipment (V-FIRE):** A \$25 million investment in the budget to bolster critical infrastructure and response capabilities for volunteer fire departments statewide.

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- **Vocational Education Extension Board of the County of Suffolk (VEEB) Funding:** Allocates \$150,000 to support the agency that trains the county’s volunteer firefighters at the Suffolk County Fire Academy.

Legislation passed by both the Senate and Assembly (pending enactment):

- **Real Property Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouses ([S688A](#)):** Sponsored by **Sen. Martinez**, this bill expands eligibility, allowing surviving spouses of volunteer firefighters or ambulance workers killed in the line of duty to continue receiving tax exemptions even if the volunteer served between two and five years.
- **Removing EMS from the Local Tax Cap ([S1515](#)):** Introduced by **Sen. Rachel May**, this proposal ensures EMS services remain fully funded and are not constrained by local tax cap limitations.
- **Specialized Electric Vehicle Emergency Response Training ([S5848](#)):** Filed by **Sen. James Skoufis**, this legislation establishes a training program to equip volunteer responders with the skills to safely manage emergencies involving electric vehicles.

Senate-approved legislation (awaiting Assembly action):

- **Increasing Volunteer Firefighter/Ambulance Worker Tax Credit ([S6233](#)):** Introduced by **Sen. Martinez**, this bill raises the annual taxpayer credit from \$200 to \$800 for active volunteers beginning with the 2025 tax year.
- **Study on Lithium-Ion Battery Fires ([S257](#)):** Sponsored by **Sen. Martinez**, this legislation commissions research into prevention strategies for lithium-ion battery fires, enhancing safety protocols for responders.
- **First Responder Safety Zones ([S4804](#)):** Drafted by **Sen. Christopher J. Ryan**, this proposal calls for the creation of designated safety zones to shield responders from oncoming traffic during roadside emergencies.

“New York's volunteer firefighters and EMS members are always there for us in times of need, and during this legislative session my colleagues and I were there for them,” said Sen. Martinez. “On National Volunteer Firefighters Recognition Day, we honor the sacrifices these neighbors make to protect our communities and make clear that New York will always have their backs, just as they have ours.”

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About National Volunteer Firefighters Recognition Day

Established by President Ronald Reagan in 1984 to honor the invaluable contributions of volunteer fire and EMS personnel, National Volunteer Firefighters Recognition Day is observed every Aug. 18. The day recognizes the dedication of these first responders, who often balance demanding volunteer duties with full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Across New York state and the nation, volunteer firefighters stand ready to serve, helping strengthen public safety and community resilience.

According to a 2023 analysis by the Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY), without volunteer firefighters, the cost to taxpayers statewide would exceed \$4.7 billion to adopt a paid service model for these essential services.

Across New York, volunteer fire agencies and emergency medical services providers have faced ongoing recruitment challenges. [FASNY](#) reports that the number of volunteer firefighters has fallen by 33 percent over the past 20 years. Ambulance providers face similar [issues](#), with longer wait times, a shrinking volunteer base and funding shortfalls that have put the emergency medical services system into crisis.