

On September 5, 2008, Governor Paterson vetoed a bill which would have allowed volunteer firefighters & EMS personnel to receive a \$200 income tax credit AND a property tax reduction. Currently, volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel are allowed to only take the tax credit or the property tax reduction, but not both. This bill would have allowed fire and EMS volunteers to receive both.

We are urging all fire and EMS volunteers to contact Governor Paterson to make your displeasure know. Also, it is urgent that you contact your local representatives and ask them to override his veto- Assembly bill A9864 and Senate bill S6869.

Below is FASNY's response to the Governor's veto.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION REACTS TO VETO OF LEGISLATION
AIMED AT VOLUNTEER FIRE/EMS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

Albany, NY (Sept. 12th, 2008) - Governor Patterson's veto of a key piece of legislation that would have allowed local governments to offer property tax reductions to their volunteers in addition to the State's \$200 personal income tax credit program drew strong criticism today from the association representing more than 130,000 volunteer firefighters and EMS responders.

"This was a short sighted move that directly impacts the recruitment and retention efforts of local fire and EMS agencies, and has happened at a time when the record prices for gasoline are a major cost factor for volunteers, who are already giving of their own time and resources," said Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY) President Thomas J. Cuff, Jr.

The new legislation was designed to correct issues in a previously enacted law allowing volunteers to receive a \$200 personal income tax credit from the State - but only if they were not receiving a property tax benefit from their local municipality. This caveat forced many volunteers to perform a series of complicated calculations each year to determine which benefit they wished to receive. It often led to volunteers undertaking a complex and onerous process of filing additional tax documents, depending on the outcome of those calculations.

In his veto memo on the legislation, the Governor cited an indirect cost associated with the new bill that was at odds with the State's current financial issues.

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Cuff reacted, “In citing this potential 1.6 million dollar financial impact on the State, both the Governor and his Counsel’s office have completely ignored the billions of dollars in payroll and benefits alone that would have to be paid by local governments if they were forced to replace our dedicated volunteers with paid staff.”

The legislature passed the legislation, sponsored by Senator Joe Griffo and Assemblymen Bill Magee, in June. The Governor’s veto message suggested FASNY should have first approached the Governor’s Division of Budget before advancing legislation with a financial impact through the state legislature. This is the first time FASNY has ever encountered this type of objection.

The legislation dealing with a \$200 personal income tax credit, and certain necessary adjustments, has been before Governors Pataki, Spitzer and most recently Paterson. Cuff stated, “It is shocking that we are being asked in a veto message, to go to the Governor first before working with the legislature to address our recruitment and retention issues.”

FASNY’s legislative focus has been on augmenting the ranks of volunteer fire and EMS responders for more that 100 years. Local governments have their own interaction with their volunteers and frequently create educational incentives, property tax reductions and other initiatives designed to garner more volunteers.

“Governor Paterson’s veto overlooks the desires of counties and other local government entities to provide their own volunteers with incentives. It also it attempts to balance the state budget at the expense of the localities and those volunteers who serve them,” said Cuff.

The current economy has placed a premium on the value provided by local volunteer emergency responders. Efficiencies in local governments have also been a focal point over the past several years. Volunteers create efficiencies and provide valuable services that would have to be replaced at an enormous cost borne solely by local property taxes. Volunteers have customarily approached both the State and Local Legislatures for assistance in funding and other operational necessities such as training funds for new recruits.

The Firemen’s Association has great concerns regarding the suggestion that it should first go to the Governor’s Division of Budget on legislative matters that may impact the State’s budget. Cuff said, “The State’s budget is only one consideration here, which must be balanced with the volunteers’ responsibility for the safety and welfare of eighty percent of the State’s geography. Legislators in the 57 counties where volunteers are providing fire and EMS have an opinion regarding their locality and we intend to continue to approach them with our problems and concerns.”

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