

NYS AFC Press Release on CDL License:

As Memorial Day approaches and we prepare to honor those who have given their lives while in service to America's military, it is likely that the public will see notably fewer fire trucks participating in Memorial Day parades and observances across the state of New York this year due to commercial drivers' license (CDL) requirements for the fire service.

As of this date, a CDL is required any time that a fire vehicle (of sufficient weight) is used for any non-emergency, such as drills/training, parades, code enforcement, building inspection, public education events, or other fire company functions. Leaders of local communities and fire departments are faced with the difficult question of either knowingly breaking the law if they use non-CDL drivers to operate fire trucks in parades or not placing fire apparatus in parades. Many departments have of course chosen to follow the law, not as a form of protest and we wish that to be clear as citizens see fewer fire trucks this year.

New York State fire service organizations such as the Association of Fire Districts, FASNY and New York State Association of Fire Chiefs (NYS AFC) have been working together with elected officials on the CDL issue. Some action was taken in the state budget recently passed. This change allowed for fire apparatus that would have required a CDL to drive to and return from emergencies. Unfortunately, the budget language didn't address all the other reasons members of the fire service drive fire trucks.

Legislation introduced by Senator Brian Foley of Suffolk County is poised to be voted and next week and we hope that legislation supported by Assembly Robert Sweeney, also of Suffolk County will move forward in the Assembly as well as Memorial Day draws nearer, it seems time is running out for the Legislature to have a bill on Governor Paterson's desk in time for fire departments to legally participate fire apparatus in parades. In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared Waterloo, NY the official birthplace of Memorial Day and it seems the height of irony that in New York it would be made so difficult to honor the brave soldiers who have died in service to our great nation.

NYS AFC has established a web site — www.wherethefiretrucks.com — that contains information to assist fire departments in explaining to the citizens they serve and to local elected officials why this decision was necessary. The association also encourages the fire service and the public to contact their local Assembly and Senate representatives to support the passage of legislation that will ensure full fire service participation in time for the upcoming Memorial Day ceremonies.