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FASNY: Volunteer firefighters save New York taxpayers \$4.7 billion annually

New study shows volunteer fire service is fundamental to keeping NY safe & economically sound

Submitted by the Firefighters Association of the State of New York

New York's volunteer firefighters, which respond to emergency calls in a majority of the state, save not only lives and property, but also billions in taxpayer dollars. According to an economic impact study released Monday by the Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY), these dedicated volunteers help New York taxpayers save \$4.7 billion annually through their services.

The report emphasizes the critical role of volunteer firefighters in safeguarding New York's communities and helping to save lives. The 80,000 volunteer firefighters in the state provide vital protection and services during emergencies, and contribute significantly to their communities through continuous training, outreach and fire safety education. They also play a critical role in the statewide response plans to major emergencies and natural disasters.

Prepared by Resolution Economics (ResEcon), the "Economic Study of The Tax Savings Generated by New York's Volunteer Fire Service" is the second study in the past decade to examine the economic impact of New York's volunteer firefighters.

Volunteer firefighters keep local taxes and expenses low by eliminating the need to pay career firefighters wages, benefits and related costs.

New York state relies heavily on volunteer fire departments, and a conversion to paid departments would cause a severe economic burden and require a massive increase in property taxes.

"This report underscores the importance and value of the volunteer



firefighting service to New York," FASNY President Edward Tase Jr. said, "Without the dedication and service of the brave volunteers throughout the state, local taxpayers would face a significant financial burden to fund the type of emergency response they are accustomed to. Our volunteer firefighters train extensively to be able to respond to their neighbors in a time of need, and we are proud to do our part to keep this great state safe, and taxpayer costs for fire protection low."

Among the findings in the report:

- Fully paid career departments would cost New York taxpayers \$4.7 billion annually in pay, benefits, operating, maintenance and capital costs.
• 31,058 full-time paid firefighters would need to be hired.
• Of New York state's 1,640 fire departments, 93.2% are all volunteer or mostly volunteer.
• If New York state switched to an

all-paid fire service:

Local government property taxes would rise an average of 28.4% absent volunteer firefighters (taxes would increase between 5.8% and 133.8% depending on the county)

There would be a one-time cost of \$8.17 billion to acquire existing structures, vehicles and equipment.

New York State Association of Counties President Michael E. Zurlo said, "Volunteer firefighters exemplify the best of New York: courage, service and sacrifice. Not only do volunteer firefighters save lives and protect property, but they also save millions of dollars of taxpayer money that can be put to use serving their communities in countless other capacities. The report released by FASNY highlights the critical need for the state of New York to invest in the volunteer fire community to ensure New Yorkers have access to reliable and effective fire service,

and that our communities continue to benefit from the dedication and generosity of these brave men and women."

"In addition to saving lives, the selfless individuals who volunteer as firefighters in New York also save residents a significant amount in tax dollars," said Gerry Geist, executive director of the Association of Towns. "Towns, and ultimately taxpayers, are able to save money by contracting with volunteer fire departments for fire protection services. We look forward to working with legislators and stakeholders on creating local options to encourage retention and recruitment, as well as state-funded programs and incentives to support volunteer emergency service providers."

"The New York State Conference of Mayors applauds the dedicated men and women of New York's volunteer fire service, and appreciates their commitment to protecting our communities," NYCOM Executive Director Peter A. Baynes said. "This report confirms what we have long believed - that the volunteer fire service is not only good for our residents, but it's good for municipal budgets, as well. We commend FASNY for commissioning this study, and look forward to partnering with them to help strengthen the volunteer fire service throughout New York state."

About FASNY

Founded in 1872, the Firefighters Association of the State of New York represents the interests of the approximately 80,000 volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel in New York state. For more information, visit www.fasny.com.

IN THE NEWS

HEAP emergency assistance still available for NYSEG customers

Company extends suspension of late payment charges until April 15

Submitted by New York State Electric & Gas

New York State Electric & Gas is reminding customers of payment options, budget billing, and energy efficiency programs to help manage their bills. Late payment charge suspension will continue until April 15, and the company will not disconnect residential customers through March 27. Customers in arrears may receive a shut-off notice if they have not yet reconciled their bills; these notices are necessary as they enable them to

apply for emergency assistance.

While global price volatility increased energy supply prices, bills for the heating season were much lower than originally expected. Gas bills for NYSEG customers were about 18% higher than last year. Initial forecasts predicted customers would see a 40% increase in gas supply price from December through March over last year. The company estimated the average residential customer in Eastern New York

would see about a 45% increase in electricity this winter. Customers saw a 36% increase. Residential customers in Western New York saw a 13% increase in electricity prices this year, compared to the 14% increase initially forecasted.

"There are many variables that impact the supply price of electricity and natural gas, but the main factor that kept prices lower than anticipated this winter was related to supply and demand," said Patrick Fox, senior direc-

tor of energy services for NYSEG and RG&E. "The Northeast experienced a much warmer winter than forecasted, leading to lower demand, and with no change in natural gas production levels, there was greater supply available for natural gas customers and electric generation, which was the main driver to lower than forecasted electric and natural gas prices."

For more information on bill assistance or other available resources, visit nyseg.com/HelpWithBill.

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