



***County Fire Coordinator Association  
State of New York***

***The Fire & EMS Service of New York  
Survey 2019***

***“What Their Telling US”***

***Target Audience:***

**New York State Fire Coordinators  
New York State Volunteer Fire Chief's  
New York State Volunteer Fire & EMS Providers**

**COUNTY FIRE COORDINATORS  
ASSOCIATION OF THE  
STATE OF NEW YORK**



**Bill Kennedy**  
*President*

**William Streicher**  
*1<sup>st</sup> Vice President*

**Vini Tankasali**  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President*

**Ricky Provost**  
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**Matt Beckwith**  
*Director*

**Tim Yaeger**  
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**Dave Alfonso**  
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**Eric Day**  
*Director*

**Richard Martinkovic**  
*Secretary / Treasurer*

On behalf of the NYS Association of Fire Coordinators Staffing Committee, we want to thank all the Fire Coordinators across New York State for supporting the “What Their Telling Us” survey project from 2019. The success of the three surveys, which targeted the Fire Coordinators, Fire Chief’s as well as all the fire & EMS responders, would not have been possible without your support. The compilation of the survey was suspended until now due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also thank all the volunteer Fire and EMS responders for their completed surveys.

The information gathered is intended to help guide the future of volunteer fire and EMS responders across New York State. The results of the survey gives us an inside look at what type of changes may be necessary to assist in recruiting more volunteer fire and EMS personnel, as well as maintain retention for existing firefighters. The world we now live in is changing daily. The fire service needs to learn what type of changes are needed to maintain the honorable service that volunteers across our great state provide.

We want to especially thank the following for all their efforts in making this survey a success.

- Bill Streicher, Fire Coordinator Wyoming County
- Tim Yaeger, Fire Coordinator Genesee County
- Bill Schutt, Past Deputy Fire Coordinator Genesee County
- NYS DHSES, Office of Fire Prevention and Control
- NYS DHSES, Policy and Program Development Unit

Again, we appreciate your efforts and commitment to this endeavor.

*NYS Association of Fire Coordinators, Staffing Committee*

**Edward Tremblay**  
*President*

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### *Staffing Team Members*

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	Steve Santa Maria	<i>Fulton County</i>
	Scott Pike	<i>Schenectady County</i>
	Eric Day	<i>Clinton County</i>
<b>Central:</b>	Matt Beckwith	<i>Chenango County</i>
	Doug Shattuck	<i>Madison County</i>
<b>Western:</b>	Bill Streicher	<i>Wyoming County</i>
	Tim Yaeger	<i>Genesee County</i>
	Jonathan Schultz	<i>Niagara County</i>
<b>Southern:</b>	Vini Tankasali	<i>Orange County</i>
	John Farrell	<i>Greene County</i>
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**New York State Staffing Team Sub Committee:**

**New York State Fire Coordinators**

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**New York State Volunteer Fire Chiefs**

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**New York State Association of Fire Districts:**

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**Fireman's Association State of New York**

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### **Position Paper**

#### **Current Issue**

Across much of America including New York State, communities are faced with the continual decline in adequate volunteer staffing within the volunteer fire service. This decrease in staffing is directly related to a nationwide decrease in the volunteer efforts, especially within the fire service. The New York State Fire Coordinators' Association recognizes that many communities are in a crisis state, requiring immediate action in order to maintain public safety.

#### **Background**

The model of unpaid volunteers providing firefighting and emergency services dates back to colonial times. In New York State alone, 1700 volunteer fire departments provide 24/7 protection to their communities. Services provided by these dedicated volunteers extend beyond firefighting to include EMS, rescue (vehicle/water/wildland), haz-mat, fire prevention, education and more.

A multitude of issues have led to this decrease in volunteers. Many of these issues are related to a decrease in "discretionary time" for most individuals. A recent statewide survey conducted by the NYS Fire Coordinators' Association canvassed fire coordinators, fire chiefs and firefighters had identified employment and family obligations as the top two reasons individuals could not volunteer or had decreased their ability to volunteer. Employment obligations were reported by 80% of the survey responders and family obligations by 75% as the top priorities.

The National Volunteer Fire Council (2018) identified the concept of "on-demand volunteerism" as unique to the fire service. As a responding volunteer firefighter you have no idea when you will be called to volunteer; it may be 3:00 in the morning, during Christmas dinner or while you

are at your son or daughters baseball game. This type of volunteering struggles to fit with today's active lifestyle.

The time requirements of volunteering are not a new issue. The New York State Academy of Fire Sciences in a 1987 report identified time constraints as having a major impact on declining volunteer numbers over thirty years ago. The report further identified the need for change in how fire protection was provided in NYS. "*We must change the way we organize and operate fire departments...a change is necessary for survival...the fire service of NYS cannot continue on the path it is now following.*"

The 1987 report calling for an operational change in the volunteer fire department service model has been backed up repeatedly since 1987. The NYS Local Governmental Efficiency & Competiveness, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Local Government report in 2008 called for a statewide review of how services were provided and managed. Again in 2014, a joint report by the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs & NYS Association of Fire Districts, Supplementing Volunteer Resources suggested a "*...strategic and integrated statewide approach will form a framework leading to success.*"

Additionally, the need for financial incentives was identified in the recent Fire Coordinators' survey. When asked how recruitment and retention should be addressed, the top five responses were financial in context. When the existing volunteers were asked what would have the greatest impact on their retention, the top four responses were again financial in nature. This follows in step with the 2018 National Volunteer Fire Council report on the importance of tangible rewards when motivating today's volunteer firefighter.

Many of the 1700 volunteer fire departments across the state are facing the same decline in volunteers. Expecting that they will individually find solutions is unreasonable, as is expecting a single solution to fit statewide.

### **Proposed Solutions**

A multitude of issues have led to the reduction of available volunteers for the fire service. Therefore there is not a single remedy that will address all of these issues. The NYS Fire Coordinators' Association recognizes two solutions that would provide the greatest impact and flexibility.

*“Seek legislation to enable authorities having jurisdiction (AHJs) the option to create, form, consolidate, or otherwise merge fire companies and departments at a countywide, regional, or cross-jurisdictional level to “right-size” provision of services across a broader tax base, geographical area, and/or population.”* As referenced by:

- NYS Association of Fire Chiefs 2019 Legislative Agenda
- NYS Fire Service Alliance 2019 Legislative Initiatives
- NYS Association of Fire Chiefs & Association of Fire Districts; Supplementing Volunteer Resources Report 2014
- NYS Local Government Efficiency & Competitiveness, 21st Century Local Government Report 2008
- NYS Academy of Fire Science; The Future of the Fire Service in NY 1987

*“Seek Legislation to provide NYS fire departments the ability to “compensate” volunteer responders as outlined in the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act”* As referenced by:

- International Fire Chiefs Association; Managing Volunteer Firefighters for FLSA Compliance 2006
- Tennessee County Fire Handbook 2004
- National Volunteer Fire Council; Volunteer Fire Service Culture; Essential Strategies for Success 2018

When combined, these two actions will allow fire departments, local municipalities and counties the ability to “right size” department operations, while also providing a level of “compensation” compensatory with available resources. This can be used as a tool to capitalize on the finite level of volunteers. Compensation provides the ability to move the volunteer fire service up on the scale of discretionary free time for individuals and attract an entirely new audience of volunteers.