

NYS Association of Fire Chiefs

2025 END OF SESSION UPDATE

The 2025 legislative session officially came to an end last week, at least for now, with the Assembly gaveling out for the year just after midnight on Wednesday morning. The final numbers: 16,765 bills were introduced, with 995 bills passing the Assembly, 1,743 passing the Senate, and 856 bills passing both Houses that will now head to Governor Kathy Hochul's desk before the end of the year.

The following is a list of final actions on the IUC Agenda bills:

1. **MAKE PERMANENT EMS COST RECOVERY:** This law, which has been in effect for three years, enables fire departments, which were previously not allowed to bill for ambulance services, to start doing so.

Current Status: Included in the Final NYS Budget.

Update: Tremendous win! Extended to 2031.

2. **Directs Counties to develop and maintain comprehensive county emergency medical system plans.**

S.7501A / A.8086A (Senator Mayer / Assemblyman Otis)

Update: Passed both houses.

Impacts of the Bill: The bill aims to enhance the framework governing emergency medical services in New York, which could lead to improved emergency response protocols, service delivery, and health outcomes for residents in need of medical assistance during emergencies.

- Mandates that each county, in coordination with their regional emergency medical services council, must convene meetings with cities, towns, and villages to develop a comprehensive county emergency medical system plan.
- This plan must assess existing emergency medical services, outline a strategy to enhance services where needed, determine the organizational structure for service delivery, and provide cost estimates for areas requiring improved service.
- The plan aims to create a framework to ensure reliable emergency medical services for all residents.
- Counties, cities, towns, and villages must collaboratively decide on the entities and organizational structures to provide these services and assign associated costs.
- The comprehensive plans are required to be completed within six months of the effective date and submitted for review to the department of health and the state emergency medical services council.

3. **ENSURE VFBL PARITY WITH WORKERS COMPENSATION:** Bring the Volunteer Firefighters Benefits Law [VFBL] pay equal to Worker's Compensation Law pay that career firefighters receive when injured in the line of duty.

Bill: S.5432/A.6410 (Skoufis/McMahon)

Update: Even though this bill is supported by fire service organizations, and has bipartisan support, it did not move towards passage.

Impact of the Bill: The weekly benefit for permanent total disability would be increased from \$600 to \$1200. The earning threshold for volunteer firefighters to maintain their benefits while working would have increased from \$800 to \$1600.

4. **MAKE PERMANENT HEART AND LUNG PRESUMPTION:** Seek legislation to make permanent laws relating to a presumption in favor of line of duty disability due to heart and lung disease.

S.8011 / A.8275 - Heart (Harckham / Jones) - Signed Chapter 143.

S.7852 / A.8276 – Lung (Harckham/Levenberg) – Signed Chapter 167.

Impacts of the Bills: Extends the coverage of benefits for an additional 5 years to June 30, 2030.

5. **CONTINUE TO IMPROVE TAX BENEFITS FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS:** Push to allow volunteer firefighters to receive both real property tax exemptions and income tax credit, while continuing to advocate for an income tax credit increase (has been at \$200 since its inception in 2006.) This credit would provide for a step increase tied to qualifying years of service up to \$2,500 for 10 or more consecutive qualifying years of service.

2025 Bill: S.6233 / A.6790 (Martinez / McMahon)

Update: This bill passed in the Senate and stayed in Assembly Ways and Means. This bill may have a better chance of passage if it were included in the Budget rather than as a stand-alone bill.

Impacts of the Bill: Increases the volunteer firefighters' and ambulance workers' personal income tax credit from \$200 to \$800 for eligible individuals and from \$400 to \$1600 for eligible married joint filers.

6. **FIRST RESPONDER PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM ACT:** Support legislation that creates a legal framework specifically for a peer support program tailored for first responders, aiming to bolster mental health resources and support within this community.

Bill: S.5407-A / A.7285-A (Harckham / Burdick)

Update: The bill was amended to expand its scope quite a bit (see below). The bill passed in the Senate but remained in the Assembly Mental Health Committee.

Impacts of the Bill:

1. **Expansion of Eligible Roles:** - The amendment to the bill significantly expands the list of eligible first responders. It now includes additional roles such as probation officers, parole officers, warrant officers, constables, uniform court officers, park and recreation forest rangers, 9-8-8 operators, coroners, medical examiners, and specified peace officers. This broadens the scope of the program to cover more personnel within the emergency response and justice systems, enhancing support for a wider array of responders.

2. **Enhancement of Training:** - The training for first responder peer volunteers is now described as "evidence-

based, trauma-informed," with additional topics such as general mental health literacy, science of addiction and recovery, and resilience training being included. This change enriches the educational foundation of the program, ensuring volunteers are better prepared to handle the complexities of mental health challenges.

3. Inclusion of Self-Harm Prevention: - The language on suicide prevention is expanded to include self-harm prevention specifically. This broadening reflects an increased sensitivity to various forms of mental distress that first responders might encounter or experience themselves.

4. Confidentiality Provisions: - New provisions emphasize the confidentiality of communications between first responders within the support program, with certain exceptions for imminent danger scenarios. This addition strengthens the privacy rights of first responders seeking support, potentially increasing their willingness to utilize the program.

5. Introduction of Grant Reporting Requirements: - Grant recipients are now required to submit annual reports detailing their use of funds, activities conducted, number of people served, and providing recommendations. This fosters accountability and transparency, ensuring effective allocation and use of resources.

6. Comprehensive Reporting and Feedback Loop: - The commissioner is tasked with compiling annual summaries and recommendations from grant recipient reports, aiming for continual improvement and effective peer support provision. This facilitates a feedback loop aimed at refining the program over time.

7. Local Government Eligibility for Grants: - Local government units are specifically mentioned as being eligible to apply for grants, likely expanding the potential reach and implementation of the program at smaller community levels. Overall, these changes significantly enhance the program by expanding its eligibility, enriching training content, emphasizing confidentiality, and instituting a structured feedback and accountability mechanism. The expanded scope and additional safeguards contribute to a more robust and inclusive support system for first responders, aligning the program with a broader mental health framework and increasing its potential efficacy.

On June 4, 2025, Senator Pete Harckham held a press conference alongside Assemblymember Chris Burdick and mental health advocates, calling for the passage of the First Responder Peer Support Bill. The event highlighted the urgent need for a statewide mental health and peer support training program tailored specifically to support first responders.

Following the press conference, Senator Harckham announced that his bill had passed the New York State Senate, marking a significant step forward for the legislation.

Assemblyman Burdick indicated that OMH is not supportive of the bill so that is why it didn't move in the Assembly.

7. Real Property Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouses of Firefighters: Relates to the real property tax exemption for surviving spouses of volunteer firefighters or volunteer ambulance workers killed in the line of duty.

S.688-A / A.5619-A (Senator Martinez/Assemblyman Stern)

Update: This bill passed both houses.

Impacts of the Bill:

1. New language (amendments to the original bill) is added to extend real property tax exemptions to surviving spouses of volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers killed in the line of duty, providing them an exemption of up to fifty percent of the assessed value of the property (previously they had no such provision).

2. The term "un-remarried" is removed and replaced with "surviving" in reference to spouses to ensure inclusiveness.
3. Provisions are established to allow exemptions for real property held by tenant-stockholders of cooperative apartment corporations, detailing how their proportional ownership is treated under the exemption criteria.
4. Eligibility criteria for surviving spouses align with their deceased spouse's service requirements, specifically stating service length between two to five years must be established by the municipality.

8. Funding for Local Governments: provides for state assistance to local governments for the enforcement of the fire prevention and building codes – “54G”.

S.3212 and A.7059 (Senator Skoufis/Assemblyman McDonald)

Update: This bill was reported out of the Insurance committee in the Senate and remained in Senate Finance. It remained in the Assembly Insurance Committee.

9. Retirement Service Credit: Establishes a retirement service credit for volunteer fire or emergency service.

S.7021/A.8082 (Senator C. Ryan/Assemblyman Eachus)

Update: The bill did not move out of committee in either house but got introduced in both houses as a result of our Lobby Day.

Impacts of the Bill:

The enactment of this bill would allow volunteer firefighters and emergency service workers in New York State to gain recognized credit towards their retirement, thereby incentivizing public service and potentially enhancing recruitment and retention within these critical volunteer roles.

It introduces a cost mechanism for service credit acquisition while outlining clear eligibility and procedural requirements, contributing to a structured approach to supporting volunteerism within the public safety sector. The state and participating employers would bear the financial responsibility for costs associated with these service credits, likely increasing fiscal burdens on local budgets if a significant number of members opt for this benefit.

Other bills of interest to the Association that passed both houses:

A34	Eachus -- Provides that the thruway authority shall issue permits for ambulances and fire vehicles for toll exemptions Same as S 31 COMRIE
A247	Eachus -- Establishes a specialized electric vehicle emergency response training program Same as S 5848 SKOUFIS
A1020	Taylor -- Relates to hazardous materials emergency response training for incidents involving lithium-ion batteries Same as S 736 CLEARE – Chapter 40 of the Laws of 2025
A1195A	Peoples-Stokes -- Relates to mandatory health insurance coverage for follow-up screening or diagnostic services for lung cancer Same as S 2000-A ADDABBO

A2177A	Lupardo (MS) -- Removes emergency medical services from the limit on real property tax levies by local governments Same as S 1515 MAY
A2748	Bronson -- Relates to eligibility for classification as permanent total disability Same as S 2537 RAMOS
A.3404A	Lavine - Relates to permitting an interpreter to remain with a deaf, hard of hearing or nonverbal patient during admission to a hospital Same as S 6223-A RYAN C
A3790	Weprin -- Relates to the reporting by the office of fire prevention and control Same as S 2703 JACKSON
A8657	Otis -- Extends the effectiveness of certain sections of law relating to real property tax exemptions for real property owned by volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers Same as S 8409 MARTINEZ