

2025 ISSUES OF UNITED CONCERN

1. MAKE PERMANENT EMS COST RECOVERY:

This law, which has been in effect for four years, enables fire departments, which were previously not allowed to bill for ambulance services, to start doing so. We will seek the introduction and passage of legislation to make the law permanent.

S.4930/A.4044 (Martinez/Jones) and Senate One-House Proposal Part UUU of S.3005-B

2. DESIGNATE EMS AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE AND EXPAND THE BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO EMS PERSONNEL AND SET STANDARDS FOR EMS:

Recognizes EMS as an essential service, establishes a special district for the financing and operation of general ambulance services, expands access to health insurance and retirement benefits available to EMS providers.

Health Executive Budget Bill S.3007/A.3007 Part R

3. 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.1663/A.4718 - Heart (Harckham/Jones) and

S.906/A.4477 - Lung (Harckham/Levenberg)

4. 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.

S.5407 (Harckham)

5. TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR UNREMARIED/SURVIVING FIREFIGHTERS' SPOUSES:

Relates to the real property tax exemption for unremarried (A.5619) OR SURVIVING (S.688-A) spouses of volunteer firefighters or volunteer ambulance workers killed in the line of duty.

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

6. FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

Provides for state assistance to local governments for the enforcement of fire prevention and building codes "54-G."

S.3212/A.7059 (Kavanagh/McDonald)

7. RETIREMENT SERVICE CREDIT:

Establishes a retirement service credit for volunteer fire or emergency service.

~~Not Introduced Yet~~ **57021 RYAN**

9. ENSURE VFBL PARITY WITH WORKERS' COMPENSATION:

Bring the Volunteer Firefighters Benefits Law [VFBL] pay equal to Workers' Compensation Law pay that career firefighters receive when injured in the line of duty.

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

10. 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.

S.6233/A.6790 (Martinez/McMahon)



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.4930 / A.4044

Senator Martinez / Assemblyman Jones

and Senate One-House Budget Proposal

S.3005-B Part UUU

Makes the Cost Recovery Law Permanent

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation which will establish a consistent framework for municipalities in New York to charge for emergency medical services, providing financial support for these essential services and ensuring their sustainability in the long term.

This bill makes permanent certain fees and charges related to emergency medical services. The bill takes crucial steps to ensure that our emergency medical services continue to be funded and operational without the threat of financial instability. By removing the sunset clause that deemed these provisions temporary, this new legislation would solidify the necessary financial infrastructure that supports the lifesaving work our emergency responders perform every day.

For too long, emergency medical services have faced the uncertainty of temporary funding measures. With this bill, we are giving these vital services the stability and predictability they need to operate efficiently and effectively. It means better planning, better response times, and ultimately, better care for our community members in their most critical moments.

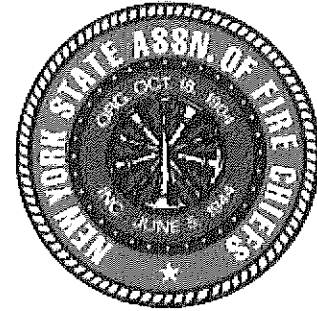
The current law has proven effective for fire departments that have allocated the necessary resources to implement the program. However, some departments have hesitated to fully embrace the initiative, concerned that the legislature might not renew it in the future. By making this law permanent, we can instill confidence in these departments, encouraging them to fully utilize this vital law. This, in turn, will yield significant benefits for firefighters, emergency medical services personnel, and patients throughout New York State.

By supporting this legislation, we are saying that we prioritize the health and safety of our citizens, and we recognize the indispensable role emergency medical services play in maintaining public safety.

We respectfully ask for your support to pass this bill and ensure that our emergency services are always able to meet the needs of those they serve.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.3007-B

Senate One-House Health/Mental Health Budget Bill Part R

Declares EMS an Essential Service

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above referenced legislation, which requires counties, cities, towns, and villages to provide general ambulance services, emphasizing these services as essential. Additionally, by allowing for the creation of special districts, the proposal provides a structured way to finance and operate these services, potentially improving their availability and reliability.

By deeming emergency medical services (EMS) as an essential service, municipalities are provided with the flexibility to ensure provision of EMS, establish statewide, regional, and county coordination of EMS, and provide for enhanced training and credentialing of EMS practitioners, agencies, and educational institutions.

EMS providers play a vital role in delivering critical prehospital medical care to individuals in emergency situations, often serving as the first line of defense in times of crisis. However, most states, including NYS don't declare EMS to be an "essential service." Therefore, State government isn't required to provide or fund them. Currently, 13 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws designating or allowing local governments to deem EMS as an essential service, including Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia. Massachusetts has legislation pending.

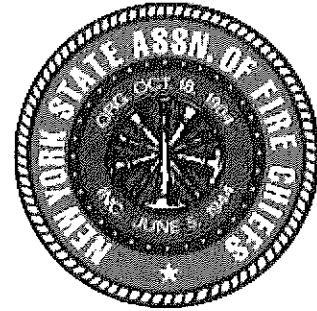
As the federal government has not taken on the authority to require this designation, it is the prerogative of states to make the choice to mandate and fund EMS. In states that don't provide funding, EMS agencies often must rely on Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements and money they get from local governments. Many of the latter don't have the budgets to pay EMS workers, forcing poorer communities to turn to volunteers. But the firefighter and EMS volunteer pool is shrinking nationally as the volunteer force ages and fewer young people sign up. By contrast, police departments are supported and receive funds from the U.S. Department of Justice along with local tax dollars, and fire departments are supported by the U.S. Fire Administration, although many underserved areas also rely on volunteer firefighters to fill gaps.

This legislation is crucial for ensuring the availability, reliability, and quality of emergency medical services throughout New York State.

It is for the abovementioned reasons we support the enactment of this legislation.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.1663 / A.4718

Senator Harckham / Assemblyman Jones

**Makes provisions permanent relating to disability due to disease or
malfunction of the heart or coronary arteries**

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation which removes the sunset clause for the presumption relating to certain heart disabilities incurred by volunteer firefighters as it relates to coverage for such disabilities under the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law (VFBL).

Established in 1979, Section 4 of Chapter 668 of the Laws of 1977 was repeatedly amended to extend its expiration date by only two years at a time. However, in 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2020, the expiration date was extended by five years instead. The current law is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2025.

This legislation is critical because it acknowledges the unique risks and sacrifices made daily by volunteer firefighters, who serve our communities selflessly and without hesitation. The nature of their work often exposes them to high-stress situations that can take a significant toll on their health, particularly in relation to heart disease and coronary artery conditions.

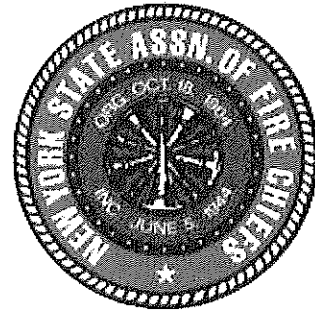
By making these provisions permanent, we ensure that those affected are not left without the support they need after dedicating their lives to protecting ours. It is a moral imperative to provide them and their families with the security of knowing that their service-related health issues will be recognized and addressed long-term.

Removing the expiration date means that these benefits are not at risk of disappearing, allowing firefighters to continue their heroic work with the reassurance that they will have assistance should they suffer from these severe health conditions.

Let us honor the commitment of our volunteer firefighters by making sure the support for their health is as enduring as their dedication to our safety.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.906 / A.4477

Senator Harckham / Assemblywoman Levenberg

Makes permanent provisions creating a presumption relating to certain lung disabilities incurred by volunteer firefighters

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation which will ensure that volunteer firefighters diagnosed with specific lung disabilities are afforded enduring recognition and benefits related to their health conditions, strengthening support for these first responders and potentially improving recruitment and retention within the volunteer firefighting community in New York.

This legislation removes the sunset clause for the presumption relating to certain lung disabilities incurred by volunteer firefighters as it relates to coverage for such disabilities under the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law (VFBL). The law originated as Chapter 606 of the Laws of 2006 and law was extended every two years, and then every five years through 2020. The law is currently set to expire on June 30, 2025.

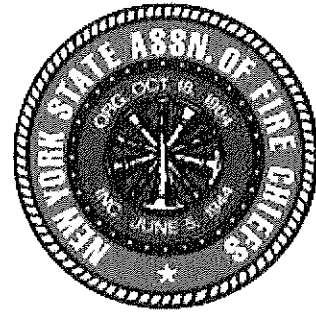
Lung disabilities for firefighters exceed that of the average adult population. Firefighters are exposed to gases, chemicals, particulates, and other substances while fighting fires that have short- and long-term damaging effects on the respiratory system. Previous studies performed during knock-down and overhaul phases show firefighters may incur exposure to toxicants and respiratory tract irritants including sulfur dioxide, hydrogen chloride, phosgene, nitrogen oxides, aldehydes, and particulate. The combustion of building materials generates countless combustion byproducts with numerous new commercial compounds introduced annually.

Due to this increased risk of inhaling dangerous chemicals, and the associated risk of lung disease associated with such, career fire service men and women are provided important lung coverage in their benefits. This legislation aims to bring parity between career and volunteer firefighters who are exposed to the same risk.

For these reasons, we support making this legislation permanent rather than simply extending it.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.5407

Senator Harckham

First Responder Peer Support Program Act

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation, which provides essential support and resources for first responders dealing with mental health challenges, ultimately promoting their well-being and resilience in high-stress environments. By formalizing this program, the bill seeks to acknowledge the unique mental health needs of first responders and foster a culture of support within emergency services.

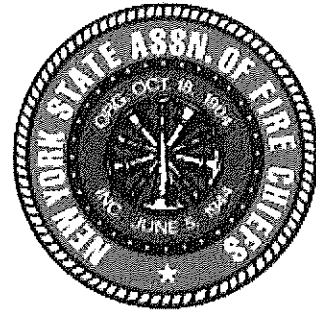
First responders are frequently exposed to stressful and traumatic situations, which take an emotional toll on them. This legislation would ensure that first responders will receive critical resources including peer support programs to address the unique challenges they face. Peer programs offer support from those who have overcome similar experiences by helping them identify risk factors for behavioral and mental health problems and encouraging conversations about mental health in a comfortable environment among peers.

The bill's concept is modeled after the remarkable and highly successful Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Project launched in 2012 that provides peer-to-peer support through confidential, one-on-one interactions among Veterans. This bill will go a long way in prioritizing the mental well-being of New York's first responders, by providing vital programs and services to connect with their peers and work together to improve their outcomes.

We fully support this legislation and urge you to vote YES on this bill.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.688-A/A.5619-A

Senator Martinez / Assemblyman Stern

Relates to the real property tax exemption for surviving spouses of volunteer firefighters or volunteer ambulance workers killed in the line of duty

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation.

This legislation proposes empowering municipalities to enact local laws or ordinances enabling surviving spouses of volunteer firefighters or ambulance workers, with two to five years of service, who tragically lose their lives in the line of duty, to retain existing property tax exemptions.

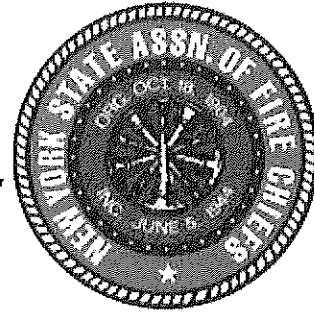
Currently, volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers become eligible for a partial real property tax exemption after serving for two years. However, the law also stipulates that an un-remarried spouse of a volunteer firefighter or ambulance worker killed in the line of duty may qualify for a property tax exemption only if the deceased volunteer had been a member for at least five years. This proposed legislation aims to rectify this inconsistency, ensuring that surviving spouses receive a tax exemption if the volunteer served a minimum of two years.

We offer the following concerns over the amendments to this bill. The change from “unremarried spouse” to “surviving spouse” would allow the surviving spouse to remarry and still retain the exemption. This change could inadvertently open the door for exemptions to be carried forward indefinitely, regardless of changes in marital status, which may not align with the intended purpose of supporting those in the immediate aftermath of a volunteer's death. Additionally, the amendments expand the property tax exemption from 10% to to 50% of the assessed value which could place an undue financial burden on local municipalities and taxpayers who need to absorb the cost of the exemptions.

We commend the sponsors for recognizing the importance of providing this vital support to spouses of volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.3212/A.7059

Senator Kavanagh/Assemblyman McDonald

Restoration of 54-G Funding

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the abovementioned legislation, which aims to improve safety standards across New York by ensuring that local governments have the necessary support to effectively enforce fire prevention measures and building regulations, thus potentially reducing incidents of fire hazards and ensuring compliance with safety codes.

We urge legislators to halt the continued sweep of dedicated code enforcement funding and ensure that state assistance to local governments for the enforcement of fire prevention and building codes resumes as is required by statute.

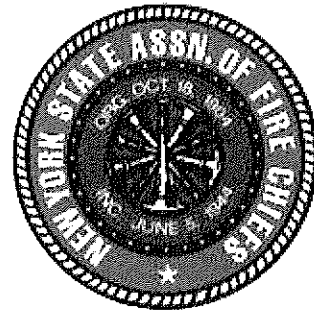
Currently, New York State mandates that every insurance company authorized to write fire insurance within the state must collect a 1.25% fee on each fire insurance policy issued in New York. These fees are then deposited into New York's Code Enforcement account, as specified by Section 9108 of the State Insurance Law.

Until 1992, the funds in this account were used to ensure local governments, responsible for enforcing the State's Uniform Building and Fire Code, received financial support from the State in accordance with Section 54-g of the State Finance Law. From 1981 to 1992, these funds flowed to municipalities to assist with tasks such as issuing building permits, conducting fire safety inspections, and ensuring adequate training and salaries for Code Enforcement Officers. However, in 1993, New York began redirecting the money from the State's Code Enforcement account into the General Fund, causing localities to lose their financial support from the State for enforcing the Building Code.

We urge legislators to pass this legislation to direct these funds back to local governments for the administration and enforcement of fire prevention and building codes within communities across New York State.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

Retirement Service Credit for Volunteer Fire or Emergency Service

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs is seeking introduction of this legislation, which was advanced last year as S.6273-B/A.7219-A by Senator Mannion and Assemblywoman Sillitti.

The legislation recognized the invaluable contributions of volunteer fire and emergency service members through the establishment of a retirement service credit. This bill represented a vital step forward in acknowledging the tireless dedication and significant sacrifices made by our volunteer firefighters and emergency service personnel. By enabling them to accrue up to three years of service credit, based on years of volunteer service, we provide a tangible form of gratitude and support for their selfless service to our communities.

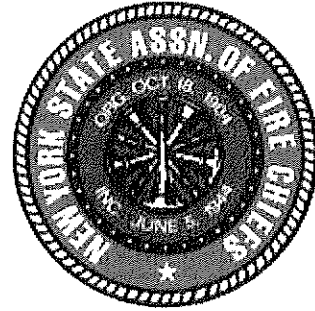
These volunteers are often the first responders, risking their safety for the benefit of others. They contribute countless hours away from their families, during both training and real emergencies, ensuring our communities are safer and better protected. This legislation took into account their contributions by offering a practical way to enhance their retirement benefits in a substantial, meaningful manner. Additionally, the bill provided a clear and fair mechanism for volunteers to earn credits, requiring verification from their respective volunteer agencies, and setting an attainable requirement of existing credited service. This maintains the integrity of the retirement system while honoring our volunteers' commitments.

Moreover, by allowing payments for this credit through payroll deductions, the proposal offers a flexible, manageable method for volunteers to invest in their future, acknowledging the financial challenges they may face. Importantly, this legislation also wisely included provisions to refund amounts paid should a member pass away before retirement, ensuring that families are not financially burdened by an attempt to secure a more stable retirement for their loved ones.

By introducing and passing this bill, we solidify our commitment to those who commit themselves to the safety and well-being of New Yorkers, without whom our communities would be much less secure.



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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.5432 / A.6410

Senator Skoufis / Assemblywoman McMahon

Increases the benefits for volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York, Inc. and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation.

New York State's provision of benefits for volunteer firefighters and ambulance personnel injured or killed in the line of duty remains a crucial support system. However, the compensation levels have not kept pace with inflation, creating a significant disparity between these benefits and those received by employees injured on the job.

This discrepancy is particularly concerning given the selfless nature of volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers who risk their safety to protect their communities. This update is not only a matter of fairness but also is a critical factor in recruitment and retention of volunteers.

The current benefit levels, which have remained largely unchanged since the 1990s, often amount to around or below minimum wage. This situation is particularly problematic when volunteers risk injury that could prevent them from working their primary jobs.

In 2021, legislation was passed to increase temporary total disability benefits for volunteers injured after July 1, 2021, from \$400 to \$650 per week. This change acknowledges the need for broader updates to the benefit system. However, further adjustments are necessary to adequately support these essential community volunteers and ensure the continued strength of volunteer emergency services.

For these reasons, we support the passage and enactment of this important legislation.



2025 Fire Service Alliance Advocacy Day



MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.6233/A.6790

Senator Martinez/Assemblywoman McMahon

Tax Credits for Volunteer Firefighters and Volunteer Ambulance Workers

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York and the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs support the above-referenced legislation which would provide significant financial relief to volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers, encouraging community service and support for essential emergency services in New York. It aims to recognize and compensate these volunteers for their contributions, potentially increasing recruitment and retention in these critical roles.

This 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. This legislation was enacted into law in 2007, but the tax credit has not been raised since its enactment.

Equally as important, the bill includes a technical fix for the statewide real property tax exemption language that was passed in 2021. By allowing volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers to receive both a personal income tax credit and a real property tax credit, this legislation will vastly increase recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters in local departments across the state.

Communities all over our state benefit from the fire protection and other emergency services provided by our volunteer firefighters. Volunteer firefighters protect our communities and lower the cost of providing this vital service. However, as the NYS Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Task Force has reported, the number of volunteer firefighters in our state and throughout our country is diminishing and there is a need to create programs for and offer incentives to those who are willing to join or continue to participate in this cause.

This legislation will go a long way to support our volunteer firefighters and is a cost-effective way to preserve a system that protects while keeping down costs. Volunteer firefighters choose to give back to their communities. Without them, many rural areas would not be able to afford full-time firefighters, leaving communities unprotected and vulnerable. This legislation will entice volunteers to join fire departments and provide the level of emergency services our communities need.

We fully support this legislation and urge you to vote YES on this bill.

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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.3234 / A.264

(Senator Cooney / Assemblyman Eachus)

Requires the commissioner of motor vehicles to adopt rules and regulations requiring the issuance of special stickers identifying alternative fuel vehicles

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York (AFDSNY) supports the above referenced legislation. AFDSNY is a not-for-profit corporation, which works to improve the fiscal responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness of fire district management through education, training and advocacy for commissioners and other fire district officials in the 57 counties outside of the City of New York.

This bill mandates the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to adopt rules and regulations for stickers that identify alternative fuel vehicles with a gross vehicle weight of ten thousand pounds or less. These stickers are affixed to both the windshield and rear window without obstructing the driver's vision or the vehicle's identification number. This placement ensures that first responders can quickly and easily recognize vehicles that operate on alternative fuels, which is critical in emergency situations.

With the growing adoption of alternative fuels, more vehicle owners are choosing professional or DIY conversions to modify traditional gasoline- or diesel-powered vehicles to run on alternative energy sources. First responders must recognize the unique risks posed by these vehicles, as their reactions to heat, flames, or water-based fire suppression methods may differ significantly from standard vehicles. This unpredictability poses critical safety hazards for firefighters and emergency teams during incident responses.

The use of easily-recognized stickers allow firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel to understand the fuel systems they are dealing with, which will guide their on-scene response and ensure the most effective firefighting strategies are used. Safety is of utmost importance in these potentially dangerous situations for firefighters and EMS.

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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT S.4618 / A.5246 (Senator Weik / Assemblyman DeStefano)

Excludes volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services employees from the permissive use of marijuana

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York (AFDSNY) supports the above referenced legislation. AFDSNY is a not-for-profit corporation, which works to improve the fiscal responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness of fire district management through education, training and advocacy for commissioners and other fire district officials in the 57 counties outside of the City of New York.

This bill seeks to ensure the safety of our communities by excluding volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services employees from the permissive use of marijuana. As outlined in the bill, these individuals are often engaged in safety-sensitive tasks under potentially hazardous conditions. Whether they're driving and operating fire apparatus, working in environments immediately dangerous to life, or delivering emergency medical care, their responsibilities directly impact not only their safety but also the safety of the communities they serve.

By establishing clear definitions of "exempt fire agency" and "exempt employee," this bill provides the necessary framework to uphold the highest safety standards. It allows these agencies to enforce reasonable measures, such as preemployment and random drug testing, to ensure that those entrusted with our safety are unimpaired and fully capable of performing their crucial duties. Furthermore, the provision for exempt employees who are prescribed cannabis for medical purposes to report their prescription is a sensible approach. It ensures a collaborative determination of fitness for duty, thereby balancing compassionate medical care with public safety obligations.

In supporting this amendment, we are prioritizing the effectiveness and reliability of our first responders, who are essential to maintaining public safety and trust. We urge you to pass this bill to protect both our dedicated emergency service personnel and the communities they serve.

Thank you for your consideration.