New York State Fire and EMS
Leadership Council Meeting Agenda

November 6, 2026

1 – 3 PM

1) Pledge of Allegiance
2) Introductions
3) Discussion around the formation of the Council
4) Review of the draft list of 2027 Legislative Objectives (see attachment A)
5) Nominal Compensation next steps
6) Legislative leadership meetings to discuss fire service roles and responsibilities
7) 2027 Lobby Day(s) and grassroots activities
8) Next Meeting
9) Adjourn

ONE FIRE SERVICE. ONE VOICE. ONE FUTURE.

New York State's Fire Service Leadership Is United

New York State's fire service is facing some of the most serious challenges in its history, including declining volunteer membership, rising operational costs, increasing regulations, and difficulties recruiting and retaining firefighters.
These challenges affect every department and every community we serve.

Addressing these issues requires experienced leadership, cooperation, and a united voice.
Four organizations are working together to help protect the future of New York State's fire service:

- **New York State Association of Fire Chiefs (NYSAFC)**
- **Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York (AFDSNY)**
- **Fire Coordinators' Association of the State of New York (FCASNY)**
- **Long Island Law and Legislative Committee (LILLC)**

This is not a proposal; this cooperation is already happening. Each organization brings valuable experience and a different perspective to the table.
Together, we represent the operational, financial, administrative, regional, and legislative sides of the fire service. We understand the challenges because our members deal with them every day.

We are not observers of the fire service. We are the people responsible for making it work.

Why Our Cooperation Matters

The four organizations working together bring something to the table that cannot be replaced by theory, political considerations, or decisions made without direct fire service involvement – practical experience.

The New York State Association of Fire Chiefs represents the operational leadership responsible for directing emergency services, managing fire departments, protecting firefighters, and ensuring that communities receive effective emergency response.

The Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York represents the governance and financial leadership responsible for managing the resources, facilities, apparatus, personnel matters, and local property taxpayers investments necessary to provide fire protection.

The Fire Coordinators' Association of the State of New York brings the countywide and regional leadership perspective, connecting departments, coordinating resources, supporting mutual aid, and helping ensure that emergency services function effectively across jurisdictional boundaries.

The Long Island Law and Legislative Committee provides legislative experience and insight into the legal and governmental issues affecting the fire service, particularly those arising from the unique challenges faced by Long Island's fire departments and districts.

Individually, each organization provides essential leadership in its respective area of responsibility.

Collectively, we bring together the operational, administrative, financial, regional, and legislative experience necessary to understand the full impact of decisions affecting New York State's fire service

Working together allows us to identify problems, develop practical solutions, and speak with a stronger, unified voice.

Fire Service Leadership Must Be Heard

Decisions involving legislation, regulations, funding, training, and administrative requirements directly affect our ability to protect our communities.

A proposal may look good on paper but create financial or operational problems when put into practice. New requirements may place additional burdens on volunteers, increase costs, or make recruitment and retention even more difficult.

We understand the demands of training and regulatory compliance, we understand the impact of rising costs, we understand the consequences of inadequate staffing, and we understand the challenges of recruitment and retention because we are the ones tasked with these critical responsibilities every day. We are not observers of the Fire Service; we are its leaders.

That is why fire service leaders must be involved in the decision-making process from the beginning.

We are not asking for our recommendations to be accepted without discussion. We are asking that our experience and knowledge be taken seriously before decisions are made.

Listening to those responsible for delivering emergency services leads to better decisions and more workable solutions.

Protecting the Volunteer Fire Service

The future of New York's volunteer fire service is at stake. Volunteer firefighters have protected some of our communities for generations, but many departments are struggling to recruit and retain members while meeting growing training and operational demands.

These problems cannot be solved with words alone. They require practical solutions that consider the realities facing firefighters, fire departments, and local governments.

Recruitment, retention, training, funding, and regulations are all connected. Decisions affecting one area can have consequences throughout the fire service.

Our organizations are committed to working together to address these challenges and protect the future of volunteer firefighting.

Our Responsibility Is Greater Than Our Individual Organizations

Our cooperation is not about promoting one association over another. It is about protecting the fire service and the communities that depend on it.

We must consider the needs of firefighters, fire commissioners, department administrators, county coordinators, local governments, and future generations of emergency responders.

The decisions made today will determine whether tomorrow's fire departments have the people, equipment, funding, and support needed to serve their communities.

We do not claim to have every answer. But we believe the best solutions come when experienced fire service leaders are involved in developing them.

A Message to the Fire Service and Our Elected Officials

Our message is simple: **The leadership of New York State's fire service is working together, and our collective experience deserves to be heard.**

We encourage firefighters, fire chiefs, commissioners, county officials, association leaders, and elected representatives to recognize the importance of this partnership.

The needs of our fire departments, the financial responsibilities of fire districts, regional emergency coordination, and state legislation are all connected. Our approach to solving these problems must be connected as well.

We welcome discussion, different viewpoints, and thoughtful debate. But those responsible for operating and sustaining the fire service must have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect its future.

The Time to Listen Is Now

The NYSAFC, AFDSNY, FCASNY, and LILLC have demonstrated that cooperation is possible and necessary. We are working together because the future of the fire service is more important than the individual interests of any one organization.

Our goal is to work, constructively, with elected officials, state agencies and policymakers to shape decisions that reflect the realities of the fire service.

We are united in our commitment to firefighter safety, responsible leadership, effective emergency services, and the long-term protection of our communities.

Now it is time for government officials, policymakers, and the entire fire service community to recognize the value of that unity.

Listen to the leaders who understand emergency operations. Listen to those responsible for managing budgets and resources. Listen to those coordinating services across our counties. And listen to those who understand the legal and legislative consequences of government decisions.

We are encouraging our Fire Chiefs, Commissioners, Firefighters, State, County and local government leaders to support this unified effort. The challenges facing our profession cross organizational, and jurisdictional boundaries, they affect both volunteer and career members, making cooperation essential to finding lasting solutions.

We have come together. We are working together. And we are ready to help shape the future of New York State's fire service.

ONE FIRE SERVICE. ONE VOICE. ONE FUTURE.

The leadership is united. The experience is at the table. The message is clear.

The future of New York State's fire service depends on our willingness to listen, cooperate, and work together. Together, we can strengthen our fire service, support those who serve, and protect the communities that depend on us.

New York State Fire and EMS Leadership Council 2027 Legislative Objectives

1) S10597 / A10630-A by Martinez / Solages – Nominal Compensation

Authorizes volunteer stipends and pay-per-call compensation while maintaining volunteer status. Provides nominal pay-per-call and paid-on-call stipends to volunteer firefighters, while preserving their volunteer status, and to create a state assistance fund to help eligible fire entities support such programs.

2) S5432/A6410 by Skoufis / McMahon - Disability Benefits Under VFBL

Increases permanent and temporary disability benefits under the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law. Provides an increase in permanent disability benefits from $600 per week to $1200 and an increase in temporary total disability benefits from $400 per week to $800.

3) S5407-A/A7285-A by Harckham / Burdick – First Responder Peer Support Program

Creates a statewide peer support program modeled after the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Program to improve firefighters' and EMS providers' mental health resources. It provides confidential mental health counseling, training for peer mentors, and protection for support communications under law. The goal is to address stress, trauma, and burnout, improving overall mental health and job performance.

4) EMS – Support Establishment of a dedicated county EMS Implementation Fund in SFY 2028 State Budget to support the recommendation and service improvements identified in the County EMS plans.

Governor Hochul signed Chapter 703 of 2025 into law with a caveat that "to ensure that such plans are successful, it is important that the Department of Health is authorized to develop guidance for the counties in the development of their plans and have a meaningful chance to review and provide feedback on such plans. Because the plans will require coordination among municipalities, it is important to designate qualified personnel as the convenor of the plan development process." The 2026 bill that was signed into law addressed her concerns by giving counties an additional six months (until December 19, 2026) to develop and maintain comprehensive county emergency medical system plans.

5) A.10059 by Solages - Amendment to the Ambulance Billing Law – Originally Enacted in Chapter 55 of the Laws of 2022 and Extended by Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2025

This amendment authorizes billing for mutual aid responses, allowing EMS providers to recover costs and eliminating prior restrictions on mutual aid billing. The law is scheduled to expire on April 9, 2031. This bill would remove the sunset clause and make the law permanent.

6) Firefighter Early Detection Cancer Screening Pilot Program Act

The proposed bill would establish a state-funded, voluntary pilot program for career and volunteer firefighters, with confidential reporting evaluations after 12 and 24 months.

7) Focused campaign to Educate all legislators as to the differences and responsibilities among the various fire service organizations

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Nominal Compensation

NYS Assembly Bill (A10630-Sologas)

1. Opening/ Why We're Here

- "Today we want to provide a brief overview of the Nominal Compensation model for volunteer firefighters and why it's becoming an impo1iant tool for maintaining reliable fire and EMS service in communities like ours."
- "This is not about changing the volunteer tradition-it's about supporting it so it can survive and meet modern demands."

2. Current Challenges in the Volunteer Fire Service

- "Across the country, volunteer membership is declining while call volume-especially EMS-is rising."
- "Daytime staffing is the weakest point for most volunteer agencies due to work and family schedules."
- "Training requirements, equipment standards, and call demands continue to grow. The service is more complex than ever."

3. What Is Nominal Compensation?

- "Nominal Compensation provides a small stipend or payment for responding to calls, attending required training, or covering assigned duty shifts, etc."
- "It is not a full-time salary. It is recognition for time and a way to offset personal financial burden."

4. Key Benefits of Nominal Compensation for the Community

- "First, it helps **recruit and retain** volunteers who might otherwise be unable to afford participation."
- "Second, it improves **response reliability,** especially during daytime hours and holidays."
- "Third, it promotes **professionalism and accountability-clear** expectations, documented participation, and consistent staffing."
- "Most impo1iantly, it supp01is the continued **viability of a volunteer model,** which saves taxpayers millions compared to a fully staffed career department.

5. What It Costs

- "Nominal Compensation does increase operational costs. However, even a robust nominal compensation program remains dramatically less expensive than hiring full-time personnel."
- "Call volume is predictable enough for budgeting, and the program can be scaled to fit the community's needs."

6. Cultural Considerations

- "Some longtime volunteers worry that paying for calls changes the nature of service."
- "In practice, most departments find that it strengthens-not weakens-the culture by recognizing the time commitment required today."
- "Clear expectations and fair policies help maintain unity."

7. Implementation Options

- "Communities can choose a per-call stipend, travel, a training stipend, or scheduled duty crew compensation or total services in a time period."
- "Participation standards and performance tracking are essential. Simple systems work best."
- "Legal, payroll, and insurance requirements must be reviewed so the program is compliant from day one."

8. The Bottom Line

- "Nominal Compensation is not a step toward a career department-it's a step toward sustaining the volunteer model we depend on."
- "It improves service, supports our members, and helps ensure we can meet the rising demands of fire and EMS response."
- "With careful planning, Nominal Compensation enhances what we already do well while strengthening our readiness for the future."

Alternative service delivery model (County/Regional supplemental options)

- **Counties need "tools in the toolbox" for last-resort gaps-without stripping local control.** The intent is a *backstop* for demonstrated failures that put public safety at risk, with tight limits and cooperation with the AHJ.
- **County supplementation improves coverage and efficiency.** It can enable shared training, shared equipment, improved mutual aid readiness, and coordinated planning, especially for rural/underserved areas.
- **This is about strengthening readiness, not punishing departments.** The concept is framed as supportive, collaborative, and non-intrusive meant to reduce disparities and close response gaps.
- **Pairing nominal compensation + service delivery options Is a practical strategy.** The joint approach addresses both *people* (recruitment/retention) and *coverage* (system resiliency), and DHSES leadership has pushed these solutions move together.

Closing/ Invitation for Questions

- "We appreciate your time and attention. We're happy to answer questions or walk through what an implementation plan could look like for our community."

Definition of an Interior "Class A" Firefighter

A Class 'A" Interior Firefighter shall be a firefighter who has met the training and certification requirements and is authorized by the Authority Having Jurisdiction to enter immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) atmospheres, such as burning structures, to perform interior structural firefighting operations.

Specific Training Requirements satisfying the training and certification requirements include (At a minimum):

- Completed Firefighter I training, or equivalent as determined by the Authority Having Jurisdiction (including the use, operations, and emergency procedures for applicable SCBA).

- Medically and Physically Qualified (OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134)

- Fit Tested for the appropriate SCBA (both initially, annually or as needed)

- Designated by the AHJ to perform interior firefighter operations in an IDLH atmosphere

- Completes all required Annual In-service Training

Example of equivalent training topics:

The skills and competencies are contained in NYS Best Practices for Fire Department Training Programs, completion of both the Competencies for Exterior and Interior Firefighters could qualify as the equivalent, when instructed by a qualified, certified, and authorized instructor. (OSHA 1910.156 Fire Brigade Standard)

SUMMARY OF BILL:

New York State Assembly Bill A10630 (2025-2026 Legislative Session) was introduced on March 13, 2026. This bill aims to address recruitment and retention challenges within volunteer fire services by allowing for direct financial stipends.

I<ey Provisions

The bill amends the General Municipal Law and the Town Law to authorize local jurisdictions to establish stipend programs for volunteer firefighters.

- Pay-Per-Call & Standby Stipends: Local authorities (counties, cities, towns, villages, or fire districts) may provide volunteers with a financial stipend for responding to emergency calls or for performing specific standby services.
- Travel Reimbursement: It allows for the reimbursement of travel expenses incurred during call responses. (Includes: gas/mileage expenses, option to provide gas gift cards instead of direct reimbursement) -- Requires verification that the firefighter responded and followed department rules.
- Optional Participation: Volunteer firefighters have the right to waive these payments and continue serving without a stipend if they choose.
- Eligibility Requirements: To receive stipends, firefighters must remain "active," meaning they must continue to meet all physical examination and entry-level requirements set by their jurisdiction.
- Compatibility with Benefits: Critically, the bill specifies that receiving these stipends does not disqualify a volunteer from earning points or receiving payments under a Service Award Program (LOSAP).

Current Status

- Current Committee: Referred to the Assembly Local Governments Committee.
- Sponsorship: The bill is sponsored by Assemblymember Michaelle Solages (D-22), with several co-sponsors including Assemblymembers Cashman, Griffin, and Woerner.

OVERSIGHT:

Because A.10630 gives local discretion, the legislation should include provisions that allow for guardrails while letting fire districts implement.

1. Clear eligibility+ response verification

- Require incident-based verification through:
    - Dispatch logs (CAD reports)
    - Officer sign-off for each call

- Define what qualifies as a "response":
    - On-scene participation vs. just signing in
- Prevent "drive-by" or minimal participation abuse

(This is the most critical control to avoid fraud or inflated payouts.)

2. Standardized local policies

Mandate each fire district to adopt a written policy covering:

- Stipend amounts (flat vs. tiered)
- Caps (per call, per month, per year)
- Eligible incident types (fires, EMS assists, drills?)

3. Financial oversight+ auditing

- Annual reporting to:
    - Local governing board (town board/fire commissioners)
- Require:
    - Line-item budget transparency
    - Public disclosure of total stipend expenditures

4. Anti-pension/ classification safeguards

A major concern is unintentionally turning volunteers into employees. Oversight should:

- Clarify stipends are not wages/salary- Fair Labor Standards Act
- Ensure compliance with:
    - IRS volunteer thresholds
    - NYS labor law definitions Without

this, you risk:

- Overtime claims
- Workers' comp reclassification issues

5. Equity+ anti-gaming provisions

- Prevent disproportionate payouts to a small group of responders
- Consider:
    - Per-member caps
    - Rotational response tracking

6. Targeted state revenue streams

Politically viable options could include:

- Insurance-related assessments {fire risk linkage)
- Public safety fees (e.g., small surcharge on certain services)

These are often framed as "User-benefit funding" rather than general taxation

7. Federal or state workforce grants

Position as a workforce shortage issue:

- FEMA SAFER grants {if structured appropriately)
- Use funds for:
    - Recruitment+ stipend pilots

New York already offers Recruitment and Retention {R&R) Grants.

- Expand these programs to subsidize stipend costs for smaller or lower-income districts.

Expand the existing Volunteer Fire Infrastructure & Response Equipment grant pool {V-Fire)

- Including "personnel support" could provide a bridge for department

8. Regional/shared service models

- Multiple districts pool funds for:
    - Shared stipend systems
- Helps:
    - Smaller districts afford participation
    - Standardize pay structures regionally

9. Foreign Fire Insurance Tax {2% Tax)

- Currently, a 2% tax on fire insurance premiums written by out-of-state insurers is distributed to volunteer fire departments for the "benefit of the department."
    - Proposed Use: Legislative tweaks could explicitly permit a portion of these funds to be used to seed or maintain stipend programs, though this is currently a protected and specific fund.

10. County-Wide Sales Tax Intercepts

- Some counties in New York have discussed "intercepting" a small fraction of sales tax revenue to fund emergency services, recognizing that fire and EMS provide a county-wide benefit that goes beyond property lines. Need to discuss further with NYSAC.

11. Program evaluation

Require periodic review (e.g., every 2-3 years):

- Recruitment/retention impact
- Cost per active firefighter
- Response time improvements

FUNDING:

1. Local property tax levy (default mechanism)

- Fire districts can incorporate stipends into annual budgets

Pros: Simple, existing structure

Cons: Tax cap pressure in NY

2. State aid/ grant program (high-impact option)

Create a dedicated fund administered through:

- New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services

Could function as:

- Matching grants (state matches local spending)
- Per-volunteer stipends (formula-based)

This would:

- Reduce local burden
- Standardized support statewide

3. LOSAP expansion or hybrid model

Options:

- Convert part of stipend into LOSAP contributions
- Hybrid: Small cash stipend+ long-term benefit

Pros: Encourages retention

Cons: Less immediate financial relief

Key policy tradeoffs to flag

Oversight vs. flexibility

- Too strict→ districts won't adopt
- Too loose→ risk of abuse or inequity

Compensation vs. "volunteer status"

- Higher stipends improve recruitment
- But risk legal reclassification issues

Local vs. state funding

- Local control= flexibility
- State funding= equity

Bottom line

A strong implementation framework would:

- Require verified, auditable response tracking
- Set clear local policies with caps
- Include state-level audit authority which already exists
- Pair the bill with state aid or matching funds to avoid over-reliance on property