

Governor Kathy Hochul
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

I write to you not only as a volunteer first responder, but as a proud New Yorker who has chosen to serve my community. I do this without compensation other than the satisfaction of being able to help my neighbors in their moments of greatest need. However, I am asking for something for my family: fairness.

Currently, when a volunteer first responder is injured in the line of duty they receive only \$400 a week in benefits under the Volunteer Firefighter's Benefit Law (VFBL) or the Volunteer Ambulance Worker's Benefit Law (VAWBL). That's less than Workers' Comp or unemployment benefits in New York. In fact, these VFBL and VAWBL rates haven't been updated since 1992.

Under your leadership, New York has been a national leader in protecting workers and standing up for equity in the workplace. But somehow, volunteer first responders have been left behind. Raising VFBL / VAWBL levels is not about politics. It's about dignity and equity. It's a recognition that when a volunteer first responder is disabled or killed in the line of duty, they and their families deserve the same protections as any other New Yorker injured on the job.

Our maximum disability benefits often amounts to just a third of what is offered under Workers' Compensation. Proposed legislation [S.5432 (Skoufis) / A.4610 (McMahon)] would raise weekly benefits for volunteers who sustain total or permanent disabilities in the line of duty to \$800 per week - just enough to reflect inflation and ensure a basic quality of life. The financial impact to the State would be minimal while the positive human impact would be immeasurable.

When we are injured while volunteering, we don't have an employer to turn to. We only have our communities and the State. Right now, the State is failing us. We urge you to stand with New York's volunteer first responders and help us close this shameful gap in protection. We don't want a parade. We don't need a ceremony. We just need the same basic support that every other worker in this state has when tragedy strikes.

Respectfully,

Your Name _____

Title – Chief, e.g. _____

Fire Department Name _____

Contact Information _____

On behalf of my department and thousands of volunteer firefighters across New York State