

6/23/08

As you may recall a few years ago the Legislature required that a Task Force be named to look into the issue of providing Health Insurance as a potential incentive for recruitment and retention of personnel. Mike Mastrianni, Jr., President of the NYS Volunteer Ambulance & Rescue Association, along with the President of FASNY and others served on the Task Force. Regrettably, while a report with recommendations was issued, the previous administration never released the report.

However, there has been some movement on the issue. Last week, the New York State Legislature passed a legislation that makes the 100,000 volunteer firefighters and 30,000 volunteer EMS personnel statewide eligible to purchase low-cost health insurance using their own funds.

This bill was spearheaded by FASNY as an effort to address the dual challenges of recruitment and retention. These are topics that we (NYSVARA) have been working with them and other provider groups on for some time. The health insurance bills, Assembly bill A7699 (sponsored by Assembly Member RoAnn Destito) and Senate bill S4617 (sponsored by Senator James Seward), now go to the Governor's desk to be signed.

This is an important step in the process of beginning to address these critical issues. Allowing potential and existing volunteers the opportunity to buy the same insurance coverage as their municipal counterparts will serve as an incentive for these men and women to join – and, more importantly, *stay with* – their local fire and EMS departments. This in turn will keep our communities stronger and safer. It should also be noted that this new law will not cost the state or local governments anything, since volunteers would be using their own funds to purchase coverage.

Please let Governor Paterson know how important this bill is to the volunteer EMS service and to the communities we serve. Please call the Governor's Office at (518) 474-8390 or visit www.ny.gov/governor/contact/index.html to send him an email. Together, we can ensure that this important bill is signed into law.

Sincerely,
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