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Stacy Albert Firefighter Safety Rescue and Special Ops Wildland

Newsday, Melville, N.Y.

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Jun. 12--Volunteer firefighters and emergency workers would be protected from disciplinary actions at their paying jobs if responding to calls make them late to work or absent, according to two bills passed recently by state legislators and awaiting Gov. David A. Paterson's approval.

Backed by the Firemen's Association of the State of New York, the legislation requires employers to allow absence or lateness if the employee is a volunteer firefighter or medical responder who was responding to an emergency.

The Senate bill, authored by Brian X. Foley (D-Blue Point), passed the full Senate on May 24. The companion bill by Assemb. Fred. W. Thiele Jr. (I-Sag Harbor) passed unanimously Wednesday.

David Jacobowitz, first vice president of FASNY, said volunteers had complained about pressure from their bosses about their attendance, and said that could hurt volunteerism and retention.

Under the legislation, an employer could charge the missed time against any accrued time off by the employee. If there is no banked time, the employer must allow either three hours in a 12-month period or two absences a year.


"This should have minimal, if any, impact on businesses," Foley said. It makes sense, he said, to protect the volunteers who perform a vital function for Long Islanders, adding that this allows them to "fulfill their responsibility to the volunteer fire department without having to worry whether they would be penalized."

All of Long Island, with the exception of the cities of Long Beach and Glen Cove, is covered by volunteer fire services.

"They should not lose pay or fear losing their job because they volunteer to save other people's lives," Thiele said in a news release.

Eight other states have similar protections, said Jacobowitz. Some civil service contracts do also, including those covering Suffolk's county workers, according to union officials.

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