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# THE BUFFALO NEWS CITY & REGION

Sunday, June 20, 2010



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**ERIE COUNTY**

The report by County Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz's auditors says, "Taxpayers deserve nothing less than the maximum value for their public service dollar."

Derek Gee / News file photo

## Volunteer firefighters seek apology for Poloncarz's retribution comment

By **Niki Cervantes**  
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Updated: June 19, 2010, 3:30 pm /  
Published: June 19, 2010, 12:30 am

After calling for a study into the consolidation of volunteer fire companies, Erie County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz conceded the issue's hot-button nature, telling reporters he was glad he lives in Buffalo because he feared retribution.

Though the comment was reportedly said in jest, John R.

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Wicka, president of the Erie County Fire District Officers Association, isn't laughing.

Poloncarz, he said Friday, should "rescind his derogatory and defaming comments."

Poloncarz was home sick Friday and did not comment. However, Tim Callan, a spokesman, said the comment was made during a news conference and was "just a joke. Everyone there understood what he meant, that the report was politically sensitive."

But Wicka and his colleagues weren't laughing.

Wicka, who is a commissioner with the Lake View Fire Department, said volunteer firefighters respond to calls "without regard to who is [in] need of emergency services."

The study released Wednesday by Poloncarz said the county's 98 fire companies—all but a handful staffed by volunteers — should examine ways to consolidate.

Poloncarz said the system is outdated and more costly than need be. He recommended applying for a state grant for an independent analysis of the situation.

But he also acknowledged the sensitive nature of the report and, in doing so, suggested during a news conference that firefighters might delay responding to a call for help from his home if he lived where volunteers provide fire protection.

"Everyone laughed," Callan said.

Poloncarz has the "highest regard for volunteer firefighters." he said.

Wicka, also critical of the report, said Poloncarz "purposely compiled and wrote it with the intention of casting a negative view of the traditions and needs of the volunteer fire service," adding that it was compiled without input from the volunteer firefighter community.

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