



The Truth About the Status of Nominal Compensation Legislation for Volunteer Firefighters in New York

FASNY Response to the August 18, 2026 NYSAFC Statement

The Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY) is compelled to respond to the recent statement issued by the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs (NYSAFC), in conjunction with the Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York (AFDSNY), and the County Fire Coordinators' Association of the State of New York regarding nominal compensation legislation. While NYSAFC is entitled to its own opinions, it is not entitled to invent its own facts to support such opinions. Among its many falsehoods, the NYSAFC statement mischaracterizes both FASNY's role in the legislative process and the benefits contained within the bill now advancing in both houses of the New York State Legislature.

We encourage you to review the article in the July-August 2026 issue of *The Volunteer Firefighter* magazine. Apparently, it is this article which prompted the public statement from NYSAFC and its so-called "coalition" cohorts. The article about the proposed legislation published in *The Volunteer Firefighter* was accurate when published and remains true today. It contains a straight-forward and detailed description of the benefits that volunteer firefighters in this State will realize when the legislation is passed. How that article became the basis for NYSAFC's vitriol and feigned outrage remains a mystery.

While the article in *The Volunteer Firefighter* gave credit to the aforementioned fire service organizations for our collective work on this initiative, the acknowledgement and accolades for collaboration went unappreciated. Some members of "the coalition" apparently took exception and chose to express their maligned thoughts publicly, rather than expressing them directly to FASNY leadership. The NYSAFC statement is both disappointing and disingenuous. Their claim for the need to present a "united front" for the fire service contained in the same statement that launches false and slanderous allegations against FASNY is a breathtaking example of their hypocrisy. Apparently, in their minds the unifying concepts of communication, collaboration, and cooperation are on a one-way street that runs only in the direction they are headed.

The most unfortunate part of the NYSAFC statement is that it fumbled away an opportunity to share the most important message to the reader, which is that the nominal compensation legislation that was endorsed by FASNY is now farther along in the legislative process than we have ever been with nominal compensation legislation, with identical bills sponsored in both the State Senate and State Assembly.



The Original Bill Promoted By The “Coalition” Was Never Going to Pass as Written

At a meeting on April 16, 2026 with legislative sponsors and every fire service organization—including FASNY — at the table, **we were all told by legislative leadership that the original Assembly bill (A.10630) as introduced and as promoted by the coalition, was never going to pass as written.** That bill required the authorizing local government “to fund the program” entirely on its own, with no opportunity for state assistance of any kind. It offered no payment option other than an arbitrary cash per-call or on-call stipend for interior firefighters, it did not include a state income tax exemption for the volunteers who received it, and it omitted any measure of oversight to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. In addition, the original bill was only introduced in the Assembly and there was no companion bill being sponsored in the Senate.

The Big Lie

The NYSAFC statement attributes the original bill’s inevitable failure as being a result of FASNY “asking for funding with only days left in the session”. That claim ignores the truth, which is that representatives from all statewide fire service organizations were told on April 16, 2026 that the original bill would not pass as written. **The shortcomings contained within the original bill itself caused it to be withdrawn.** The fact that the original bill would have left smaller and financially constrained departments unable to compete with affluent ones — one of the gross inequities FASNY identified from the outset – was only one of a host of problems with the original bill.

The Current Bill Advancing Is a Stronger, Better Bill

Unlike the prior version, the current bill is sponsored in both houses of the Legislature — as Senate Bill S.10597 (Senator Monica Martinez) and its Assembly companion, A.10630-A (Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages), the chairs, respectively, of each house’s Local Government Committee. Assemblywoman Solages sponsored the original bill, and then modified her bill in May 2026 to substitute it with the much-improved version of A.10630-A that is pending. **The current Senate and Assembly bills are substantively identical, reflecting genuine, coordinated support behind the legislation now moving forward.** We appreciate the diligence and thoughtfulness that Senator Martinez and Assemblywoman Solages have demonstrated throughout their work on this bill.

It should not be lost upon the reader that the bill described and lamented in the NYSAFC statement does not exist. Rather, it was withdrawn and replaced in full by its sponsor to the current, improved version.

The current bill gives departments a wider range of compensation options that the original bill did not have. It expressly defines a “nominal fee” to include “a stipend, fee, gift card or gift certificate, gratuity, or other qualifying item of monetary value,” so departments of every size can structure a program that fits their budget and their members’ needs.



The current bill exempts these nominal fees “from payroll and income taxation under New York State law”, in that it excludes the benefit from being included in a volunteer’s income for New York State tax purposes. This was not in the original bill referenced by NYSAFC.

The current bill creates the State funding mechanism the original bill lacked entirely: the Volunteer Fire Service Nominal Compensation Assistance Fund, initially authorized at \$15 million and prioritized for departments with demonstrated need and lower revenues under \$400,000 annually. Where the original bill would have made every department pay for its own program out of local funds alone, the current bill ensures that a volunteer's ability to receive nominal compensation does not depend on the wealth of the community he or she serves.

Advocating for a Workable Program Is Progress, Not Opposition

FASNY has consistently supported the implementation of an effective, comprehensive, and thoughtful program for nominal compensation as a tool for both recruitment and retention. FASNY opposed endorsing a proposal that lacked responsible oversight and reporting responsibilities, failed to authorize a broad range of benefits including gift cards and other types of compensation, lacked income tax protections, and would have let departments in affluent communities outbid their neighboring working-class departments for the same volunteers, with no state-funding mechanism to level that playing field.

Each of the improvements now in the bill — sponsorship in both houses of the Legislature, the broader range of payment options, the State income tax exemption for recipients, and the State funding piece — are provisions the original bill did not contain and are exactly the safeguards that FASNY – and to our understanding, the other fire service organizations – identified as important to make this legislation work for every fire department in New York, not just those in the wealthy communities that can afford it. There is still more work to be done on the current version of the bill to further refine it and enhance it for New York’s volunteer fire service.

FASNY remains committed to working with the Legislature and with every bona fide regional and statewide fire service organization to see this bill enacted as part of a broader recruitment and retention strategy. That strategy also includes an increase to the tax credit for volunteer firefighters and ambulance personnel, real property tax relief for volunteers, greater workplace protections for volunteers, and incentives designed to attract future generations of volunteer firefighters. **That work is best done at the table, not through public tantrums and missives posted on blogs that deliberately misstate FASNY’s longstanding positions and advocacy on key issues affecting the volunteer fire service.**

While coalitions that seek to align various groups to promote their own self-interests and agenda will come and go, **FASNY is and will remain as the only state-wide fire service organization whose mission is to serve the men and women that do the job that every other fire service organization depends on for its success and existence,** you, the volunteer firefighters of the State of New York.