

NEW JERSEY STATE FIREFIGHTER'S ASSOCIATION

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Jennie M. Hollingsworth, Field Examiner

Legislative Report October 1, 2026

Legislative Committee Members.

Current Bills that we are tracking are 159 Fire and Emergency Services, 59 Firemen's Home and 50 Pensions for a total of 268.

This morning President Joseph Hankins and I attended a hearing on the below listed bills, President Hankins testified specifically on bill S-1566.

All bills after testimony were released from the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee.

S-385 (Stack, Turner) - Establishes fire safety standards and protocols for certain light frame residential construction; requires placards identifying primary structural systems of buildings.

This bill has been introduced every legislative session since 2016.

The bill conditions the use of light frame construction for certain new multi-unit residential buildings on enhanced fire suppression, compartmentation, and height/story limitations, and it adds an active construction-phase monitoring requirement, or fire warden or a compatible technology, during non-working hours. It also strengthens firefighter/public awareness through expanded exterior emblems and new structural-system placards. Successful implementation will depend on timely DCA rulemaking, clear standards for acceptable monitoring technology, and workable coordination between the Division of Fire Safety and local enforcing agencies. The primary impacts are expected to be increased construction compliance costs and increased State/local oversight activity, with partial State cost recovery through authorized administrative fees.

S-386 (Stack) - Requires certain residential buildings to have fire barriers in common attic areas.

This legislation has been introduced in every session since 2018.

This bill establishes a statewide residential fire-safety requirement for certain multi-story, multi-unit buildings by mandating three-hour fire-resistance-rated fire barriers in common loft/attic/cockloft spaces above and beyond existing separations between dwelling units. It directs the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to adopt implementing rules and update the construction code, applies the requirement to certain new permit applications, and sets a retrofit compliance timeline for existing qualified residential buildings with an inspection mechanism tied to the Hotel and Multiple Dwelling Law framework.

S-1566 (Amato, Singer) - Establishes "Volunteer Fire Company Assistance Program" in DCA to support operations and sustainability of volunteer fire companies; appropriates \$10 million.

Bill has been introduced since 2022.

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This bill establishes the “Volunteer Fire Company Assistance Program Act,” creating a State-administered grant program within the Division of Fire Safety to support the ongoing operations and sustainability of volunteer fire companies. The act creates a dedicated, non-lapsing fund credited through legislative appropriations, sets application and reporting requirements for participating companies, requires public-facing comparative reporting by the Division, and appropriates \$10 million from the General Fund to seed the program. The bill authorizes annual distribution of grant funds to volunteer fire companies to support operations and sustainability, including purchase of eligible “emergency equipment.” Defines eligible “emergency equipment” broadly (e.g., PPE, hoses, tools, training, certain costs such as insurance and utilities) while expressly excluding purchase of vehicles or buildings. Requires applicant volunteer fire companies to submit grant applications detailing requested amounts, proposed purchases, and how funds will support sustainability and compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

This seems a bill the NJSFA should consider supporting publicly. Not sure how far it will get, but the sponsor is a good friend of volunteer firefighters.

S-1755 (Singleton) - Permits inclusion of volunteer firefighters and other emergency responders within municipal eligible employee group for purposes of the small employer health benefits plan statutes.

Bill has been introduced each session since 2012.

This bill amends the Small Employer Health Benefits Program law to clarify that certain municipal volunteers may be treated as “eligible employees” for purposes of enrollment in small employer health benefits plans. The change is aimed at resolving a conflict between statutes that authorize municipalities to offer group health coverage to volunteer fire and emergency services personnel and small employer plan eligibility rules, allowing those volunteers to be covered under the same municipal group plan when the municipality qualifies as a small employer. Expands the definition of “eligible employee” to include members of volunteer fire companies and incorporated volunteer first aid, emergency, rescue, or ambulance squads who are eligible for municipal group health benefits under existing municipal authority. Clarifies that municipalities treated as small employers may include these qualifying volunteers in the covered group under a small employer health benefits plan.

The sponsor is a friend, and it addresses volunteer firefighters.

S-3526 (Beach) - Authorizes creation of non-lapsing fire academy trust fund by county.

The bill authorizes counties to create a dedicated “Fire Academy Trust Fund” to hold course registration fees paid by individuals attending county fire academy programs. Money in the fund may be spent only for specified fire academy operating and maintenance needs, allowing revenues to be carried forward beyond a single budget year rather than lapsing into general surplus. It also updates the Local Budget Law’s dedicated revenue provisions to explicitly recognize fire academy trust fund fee revenues as a permissible dedicated revenue source in local budgeting.

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Respectively yours,

Richard K. Dreby

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