

Measure Would Provide a \$1,000 Federal Tax Credit for Volunteers

Washington, DC - In an effort to both honor the service of volunteer firefighters and emergency response personnel as well as to boost the recruitment and retention of these vital first responders, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today introduced the Supporting Emergency Responders Volunteer Efforts (SERVE) Act. U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) will be supporting Hinchey's efforts by introducing the congressman's bill in the Senate.

"By providing a \$1,000 tax credit to volunteer firefighters and emergency service personnel we are thanking current volunteers for their continued service and providing an incentive to attract new individuals to join local fire and emergency response departments where their help is desperately needed," Hinchey said. "Many communities, especially those in rural areas where budgets are tight, are dependent upon volunteer firefighter and paramedics. This bill will help ensure that volunteer departments are adequately staffed and that our heroic firefighters and emergency personnel are properly thanked for their selfless efforts."

If enacted, the SERVE Act, which has bipartisan support, would provide a \$1,000 federal tax credit to individuals who are active members of volunteer fire departments and emergency service crews. To qualify for the refundable tax credit, firefighters and paramedics must serve at least 40 hours over the course of six months of the year. The SERVE Act would promote staffing at these emergency organizations to maintain the proper services needed to protect New York's communities.

Seventy-two percent of all firefighters in the United States are volunteers. According to the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), there are 100,000 volunteer firefighters in New York, but departments are having greater trouble with recruiting young people to join the ranks. Many departments are having a particularly hard time filling crews, especially during the day when most people are working. The National Volunteer Fire Council, which has endorsed the SERVE Act, reports that the number of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. has declined by more than 8 percent since 1984. That figure is estimated to be even higher for New York. Major factors contributing to the decline in volunteer firefighters include more rigorous training requirements and the higher cost of living that makes it hard for people to volunteer so much of their time.

Hinchey is a strong supporter of firefighters and emergency service personnel. He supports full funding of the federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and has sponsored a number of workshops across New York to help local fire departments successfully navigate the grant application process.

While the bill Hinchey introduced today is new, the congressman authored related legislation in the two previous terms of Congress.