

*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), Congresswoman Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Congressman Michael A. Arcuri (D-NY), and Congressman John Hall (D-NY) today introduced the Supporting Emergency Responders Volunteer Efforts (SERVE) Act that would provide those volunteers with a \$1,000 federal tax credit.

"Day after day our volunteer firefighters and emergency service personnel risk their lives in order to keep us all safe without receiving any compensation. This bill is the least we can do to express our gratitude for all that our volunteer first responders do for our communities," Hinchey said. "Providing a \$1,000 tax credit will also serve as an important recruitment tool for local governments to boost enrollment in their volunteer fire and emergency service departments. In addition, the credit can help offset the cost of the many calls and training sessions that volunteers attend on their own time and at their own expense. This is an important piece of legislation and I look forward to working with my colleagues to get it passed and enacted."

"Our brave first responders provide critical services for the safety and security of our local communities," said Gillibrand. "It's my hope that these funds will encourage more people in the community to serve as volunteer firefighters and reward our firefighters who presently serve their local communities so courageously."

"Local first responders work tirelessly, many of them as volunteers, to keep our homes safe and protect our families in the event of a fire or emergency situation," said Arcuri. "This tax credit will help local departments recruit and retain the brave volunteers who are vital to the security of communities across New York and America. I am proud to cosponsor this critical legislation to justly reward the brave men and women who volunteer for one of the most valuable forms of public service."

"It has been estimated that volunteer firefighters save the American taxpayer more than \$37.2 billion every year," said Hall. "It is only right that our country allows them to save some of their tax dollars as well. This new tax credit to bring savings for volunteer firefighters is a good investment in the health and safety of our communities."

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 reward these brave men and women who risk their lives for little or no compensation. The SERVE Act would promote staffing at these emergency organizations to maintain the proper services needed to protect New York's communities. Under the SERVE Act, any taxpayer who is a volunteer firefighter or EMS worker for the full year is entitled to a refundable federal tax credit of \$1,000; if they work for part of the year, they are entitled to a pro-rated amount. A refundable tax credit means that if the credit exceeds an individual's federal tax liability, they would receive the remainder as a tax refund.

Seventy-two percent of all firefighters in the United States are volunteer. According to the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), there are 116,000 volunteer firefighters in New York, but departments are having more and more trouble 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, Gillibrand, Arcuri, and Hall are strong supporters of firefighters and emergency service personnel. They all support full funding of the federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and have sponsored a number of workshops across New York to help local fire departments successfully navigate the grant application process. Hinchey has introduced the SERVE Act in previous sessions of Congress.