

December 29, 2023

Brothers and Sisters,

As 2023 draws to a close, I write to express my appreciation for each of you and to convey my sincere gratitude for your support, dedication and hard work. Together, as a union, we have accomplished so much this year and I wanted to take a moment to reflect on our successes.

First and foremost we demonstrated our commitment and loyalty to one another, proving the strength of our resolve during challenging times. We stayed strong. This is what belonging to the brotherhood is all about.

On the legislative front in Albany, we had another productive year. We engaged directly and aggressively with key state and local leaders on important policy matters, making it clear that our organization's voice must and will be heard on political matters affecting us, our families and our communities.

During the budget process this year, we ran a campaign with the NYS AFL-CIO to oppose language in the proposed budget that provided hourly salaries to volunteers. This effort resulted in the elimination of that language and added new language, written by Rich Corenthal, demanding accountability for training reimbursement costs. While making it clear that this was not the way to address short-comings in the volunteer ranks, we underscored a key point: the safety of a community is only guaranteed by well-trained, professional firefighters, prepared and ready to respond at any time, to all incidents.

The approved state budget included another round of funding for safety, health, and wellness programs to benefit our members – bringing our two-year total to \$1.5 million. In addition, the budget language clarified and strengthened eligibility for our presumptive heart disability benefits.

Governor Hochul's recent approval of the 1-Year FAS legislation demonstrated that there are multiple steps to surmounting obstacles and realizing our objectives. It is important that we stay focused on each mission; that we continue to develop relationships; educate our representatives and persevere with a process that can often seem slow and cumbersome.

This year we participated in a senate panel to discuss problems with recruitment and retention. We used this platform to expose the erosion of benefits and explain

the necessity of attracting capable candidates. To this end we recommended the signing of the FAS bill, which would show willingness to restore crucial protections.

On a local level, we passed a bill providing benefits for the widow of a member in Greenburgh and we corrected a pension matter for a member in Binghamton.

And, while these are all significant victories, there is much more work to be done. In 2024 we will continue the fight for pension tier fairness, to address the downstream consequences of Tiers V and VI. We will also work to deliver protection for our members from presumed illness linked to the performance of duty, and to provide a permanent recurring source of funding associated with foreign fire insurance monies.

We remain committed to the well-being of our brothers and sisters, who work under extraordinary stress and are repeatedly exposed to trauma. The impact upon mental and physical health can be significant and, without ongoing vigilance, a silent threat.

I am grateful for your continued confidence. As we approach another year, we are stronger than ever and I look forward to serving this union and all our members, whatever the future brings.

May your New Year be filled with joy and peace.

Be safe. And stay strong.

Samuel A. Fresina
President
NYSPFFA

