

# Supporting Emergency Responders Volunteer Efforts (The SERVE Act)

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Congressman Maurice Hinchey (NY-22)

## THE PROBLEM

### Recruitment and retention has become a critical issue for many volunteer fire departments and EMS

organizations across the country. Volunteer organizations are being challenged by growing populations and greater calls for service. Training requirements have also increased and, in some parts of the country, long commutes to their day jobs keep volunteers farther away from the communities they serve. As a result the ranks of the volunteers have decreased over 10% in the last 20 years, and the numbers show no sign of recovery.

- **75% of firefighters are volunteers.** Every day hundreds of thousands of Americans voluntarily risk their lives to serve their communities as firefighters and emergency personnel, outnumbering their paid counterparts three-to-one. They handle the full range of fire-related duties, and in some of the most populated cities and towns, perform as complex fire services as those in paid departments.
- **American communities depend on the services of volunteer organizations.** The members of these groups respond to a wide array of emergencies, including structure and wild land fires, medical calls, motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters and acts of terrorism. With enough active members strategically distributed throughout a municipality, volunteer departments can respond quickly and efficiently.
- **Volunteer emergency services save American taxpayers an estimated \$37.2 billion per year.** The funding of paid departments are met by taxes assessed by the jurisdiction, with approximately 94% of the taxes collected going to paying for salaries and benefits -- lest paid by the taxpayer usually through property taxes. Because volunteer firefighters and emergency personnel receive no pay and benefits, the cost associated with this tax incentive is quite small as compared to these savings.

## THE SOLUTION

The Federal government can contribute and help reverse this trend by encouraging such willing acts of courage. Desired improvements can be met if there are incentives to get people to come into the voluntary fire and emergency services. Providing a \$1000 tax credit can serve as an important recruitment tool for local groups to boost enrollment numbers. In addition, the credit can help offset the cost of the many calls and training sessions volunteers attend on their own time and at their own expense. Most importantly, it is a way for the Federal government to express the country's enormous gratitude for the sacrifices they voluntarily make each day.

**H.R. 934, the "Supporting Emergency Responders Volunteer Efforts (SERVE) Act of 2005," has been endorsed by the National Volunteer Fire Council, a non-profit membership association representing more than 800,000 members of America's volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services.**

If enacted, the SERVE Act would --

- Provide a \$1,000 federal tax credit to individuals who are active members of volunteer fire departments and emergency service crews.
- Reward these brave men and women who risk their life for little or no compensation.
- Promote staffing numbers to reach a level that allow these emergency organizations to maintain the proper services needed to protect our country's communities.