



***County Fire Coordinator Association  
State of New York***

***The Fire & EMS Service of New York  
Survey 2019***

***“What Their Telling US”***

***Target Audience:***

**New York State Fire Coordinators  
New York State Volunteer Fire Chief's  
New York State Volunteer Fire & EMS Providers**

**COUNTY FIRE COORDINATORS  
ASSOCIATION OF THE  
STATE OF NEW YORK**



**Bill Kennedy**  
*President*

**William Streicher**  
*1<sup>st</sup> Vice President*

**Vini Tankasali**  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President*

**Ricky Provost**  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President*

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**Dave Alfonso**  
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**Eric Day**  
*Director*

**Richard Martinkovic**  
*Secretary / Treasurer*

On behalf of the NYS Association of Fire Coordinators Staffing Committee, we want to thank all the Fire Coordinators across New York State for supporting the “What Their Telling Us” survey project from 2019. The success of the three surveys, which targeted the Fire Coordinators, Fire Chief’s as well as all the fire & EMS responders, would not have been possible without your support. The compilation of the survey was suspended until now due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also thank all the volunteer Fire and EMS responders for their completed surveys.

The information gathered is intended to help guide the future of volunteer fire and EMS responders across New York State. The results of the survey gives us an inside look at what type of changes may be necessary to assist in recruiting more volunteer fire and EMS personnel, as well as maintain retention for existing firefighters. The world we now live in is changing daily. The fire service needs to learn what type of changes are needed to maintain the honorable service that volunteers across our great state provide.

We want to especially thank the following for all their efforts in making this survey a success.

- Bill Streicher, Fire Coordinator Wyoming County
- Tim Yaeger, Fire Coordinator Genesee County
- Bill Schutt, Past Deputy Fire Coordinator Genesee County
- NYS DHSES, Office of Fire Prevention and Control
- NYS DHSES, Policy and Program Development Unit

Again, we appreciate your efforts and commitment to this endeavor.

*NYS Association of Fire Coordinators, Staffing Committee*

**Edward Tremblay**  
*President*

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	Scott Pike	<i>Schenectady County</i>
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	Jonathan Schultz	<i>Niagara County</i>
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### **Position Paper**

#### **Current Issue**

Across much of America including New York State, communities are faced with the continual decline in adequate volunteer staffing within the volunteer fire service. This decrease in staffing is directly related to a nationwide decrease in the volunteer efforts, especially within the fire service. The New York State Fire Coordinators' Association recognizes that many communities are in a crisis state, requiring immediate action in order to maintain public safety.

#### **Background**

The model of unpaid volunteers providing firefighting and emergency services dates back to colonial times. In New York State alone, 1700 volunteer fire departments provide 24/7 protection to their communities. Services provided by these dedicated volunteers extend beyond firefighting to include EMS, rescue (vehicle/water/wildland), haz-mat, fire prevention, education and more.

A multitude of issues have led to this decrease in volunteers. Many of these issues are related to a decrease in "discretionary time" for most individuals. A recent statewide survey conducted by the NYS Fire Coordinators' Association canvassed fire coordinators, fire chiefs and firefighters had identified employment and family obligations as the top two reasons individuals could not volunteer or had decreased their ability to volunteer. Employment obligations were reported by 80% of the survey responders and family obligations by 75% as the top priorities.

The National Volunteer Fire Council (2018) identified the concept of "on-demand volunteerism" as unique to the fire service. As a responding volunteer firefighter you have no idea when you will be called to volunteer; it may be 3:00 in the morning, during Christmas dinner or while you

are at your son or daughters baseball game. This type of volunteering struggles to fit with today's active lifestyle.

The time requirements of volunteering are not a new issue. The New York State Academy of Fire Sciences in a 1987 report identified time constraints as having a major impact on declining volunteer numbers over thirty years ago. The report further identified the need for change in how fire protection was provided in NYS. *"We must change the way we organize and operate fire departments...a change is necessary for survival...the fire service of NYS cannot continue on the path it is now following."*

The 1987 report calling for an operational change in the volunteer fire department service model has been backed up repeatedly since 1987. The NYS Local Governmental Efficiency & Competiveness, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Local Government report in 2008 called for a statewide review of how services were provided and managed. Again in 2014, a joint report by the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs & NYS Association of Fire Districts, Supplementing Volunteer Resources suggested a *"...strategic and integrated statewide approach will form a framework leading to success."*

Additionally, the need for financial incentives was identified in the recent Fire Coordinators' survey. When asked how recruitment and retention should be addressed, the top five responses were financial in context. When the existing volunteers were asked what would have the greatest impact on their retention, the top four responses were again financial in nature. This follows instep with the 2018 National Volunteer Fire Council report on the importance of tangible rewards when motivating today's volunteer firefighter.

Many of the 1700 volunteer fire departments across the state are facing the same decline in volunteers. Expecting that they will individually find solutions is unreasonable, as is expecting a single solution to fit statewide.

### **Proposed Solutions**

A multitude of issues have led to the reduction of available volunteers for the fire service. Therefore there is not a single remedy that will address all of these issues. The NYS Fire Coordinators' Association recognizes two solutions that would provide the greatest impact and flexibility.

*“Seek legislation to enable authorities having jurisdiction (AHJs) the option to create, form, consolidate, or otherwise merge fire companies and departments at a countywide, regional, or cross-jurisdictional level to “right-size” provision of services across a broader tax base, geographical area, and/or population.”* As referenced by:

- NYS Association of Fire Chiefs 2019 Legislative Agenda
- NYS Fire Service Alliance 2019 Legislative Initiatives
- NYS Association of Fire Chiefs & Association of Fire Districts; Supplementing Volunteer Resources Report 2014
- NYS Local Government Efficiency & Competitiveness, 21st Century Local Government Report 2008
- NYS Academy of Fire Science; The Future of the Fire Service in NY 1987

*“Seek Legislation to provide NYS fire departments the ability to “compensate” volunteer responders as outlined in the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act”* As referenced by:

- International Fire Chiefs Association; Managing Volunteer Firefighters for FLSA Compliance 2006
- Tennessee County Fire Handbook 2004
- National Volunteer Fire Council; Volunteer Fire Service Culture; Essential Strategies for Success 2018

When combined, these two actions will allow fire departments, local municipalities and counties the ability to “right size” department operations, while also providing a level of “compensation” compensatory with available resources. This can be used as a tool to capitalize on the finite level of volunteers. Compensation provides the ability to move the volunteer fire service up on the scale of discretionary free time for individuals and attract an entirely new audience of volunteers.

# **NYS Fire Coordinators Association**

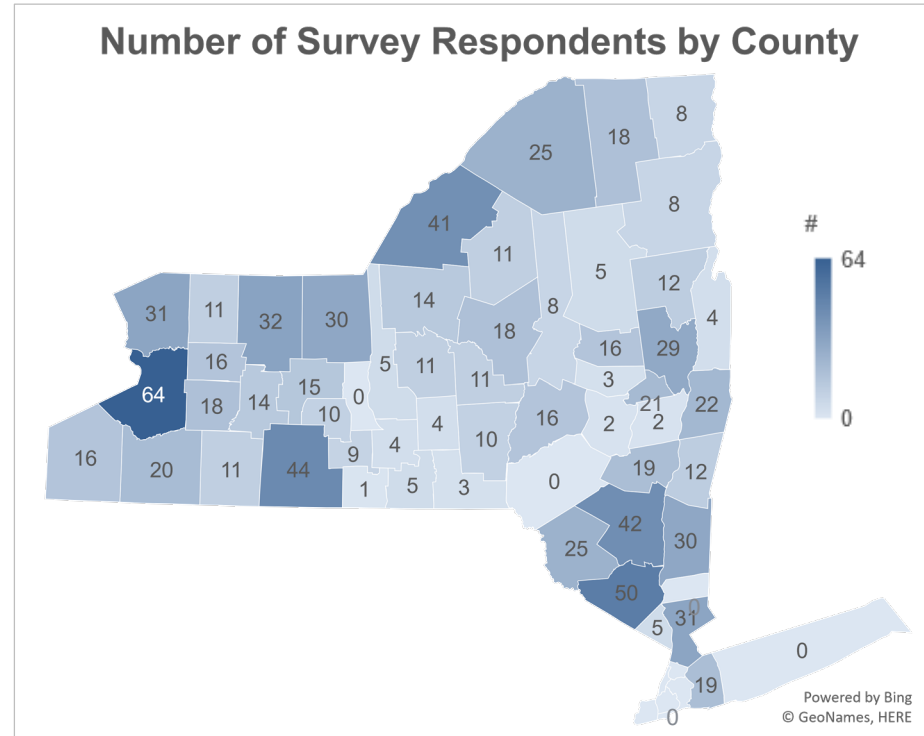
**Analysis from Fire Chiefs,  
Volunteer Fire & EMS Responders,  
and Fire Coordinators**



# Fire Chiefs Survey Results

# The Survey and the Use of Data

- The following questions were answered by **913** Fire Chiefs across New York State
  - **853** respondents indicated they represented a volunteer department
  - **60** indicated they represented a paid department
- **53** of **58** counties completed the survey
  - *Delaware, NYC, Putnam, Seneca and Suffolk*



# The Survey and the Use of Data

- Data is not representative of all fire departments but highlights trends in the fire service in New York State
- Responses to each question were aggregated to allow for comparability

# Key Findings

- **93%** of fire departments in New York State are staffed by all volunteers
- Paid departments have approximately **2x** as many interior firefighters.
- **76%** of volunteer firefighters indicated that their department has seen a **significant decrease** in volunteer service participation
- Active interior firefighters make up an average of **55%** of the response force of New York State fire departments
- The largest age group for active **interior firefighters** was reported to be **36-50 years of age**
- **41%** of fire departments in New York State currently have a Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP Retirement)

# Volunteer Department Composition

- 93% of respondents reported that their department was staffed by all volunteers
- 7% reported that there are paid positions within their department

Position	Volunteer*
<b>Interior Firefighter</b>	23
<i>Age 18-25</i>	6
<i>Age 26-35</i>	6
<i>Age 36-50</i>	7
<i>Age 51+</i>	4
<b>Exterior Firefighter</b>	15
<b>Fire Police</b>	3
<b>EMS</b>	2
<b>Social/Admin Staff</b>	7
<b>Certified EMS</b> (subset of categories above)	7

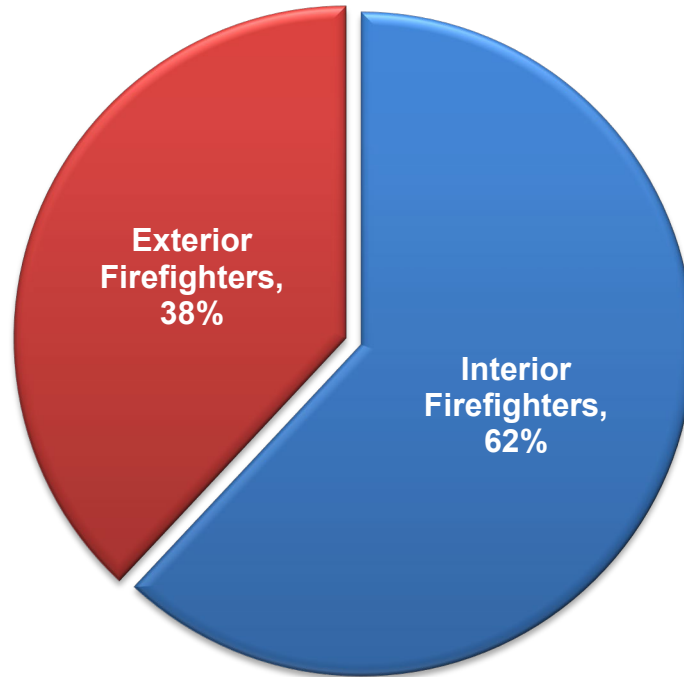
# Volunteer Department Composition: All Positions\*

- Data from the survey shows there are **more than 36,997 volunteer** fire responders in New York State.
- Aggregated data shows the **average number of active volunteer interior firefighters is 23 individuals per department.**
- The **average number of volunteer exterior firefighters is 15 individuals per department.**
- The **average department has 7 individuals** that address **social/ administrative duties.**

Position	Count	Average # per department
Interior Firefighter	19,576	23
Exterior Firefighter	12,946	15
Fire Police	2,765	3
EMS Only	1,710	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,997</b>	<b>43</b>

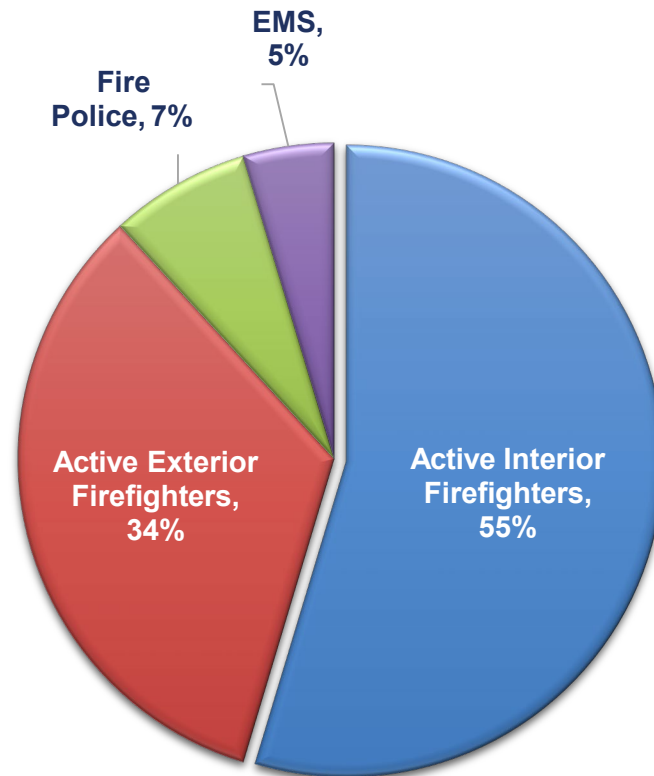
*\*Includes all survey data to include paid and volunteer departments*

# Department Composition: Interior vs. Exterior



# Department Composition: All Positions

- On average, active interior firefighters make up 55% of the departments surveyed, followed by active exterior firefighters at 34%
- EMS responders make up the smallest percentage at around 5%
- According to the survey, 21% of fire responders\* are EMS certified

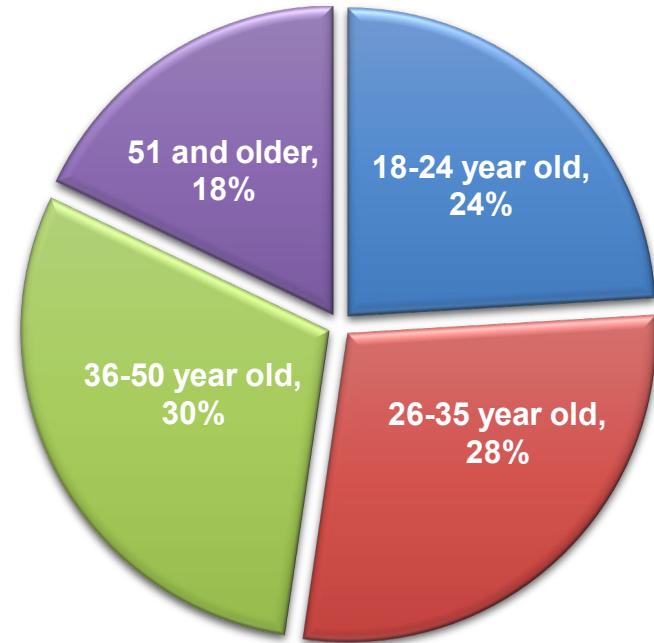


\*Fire Responders includes fire police, active exterior firefighters, and active interior firefighters



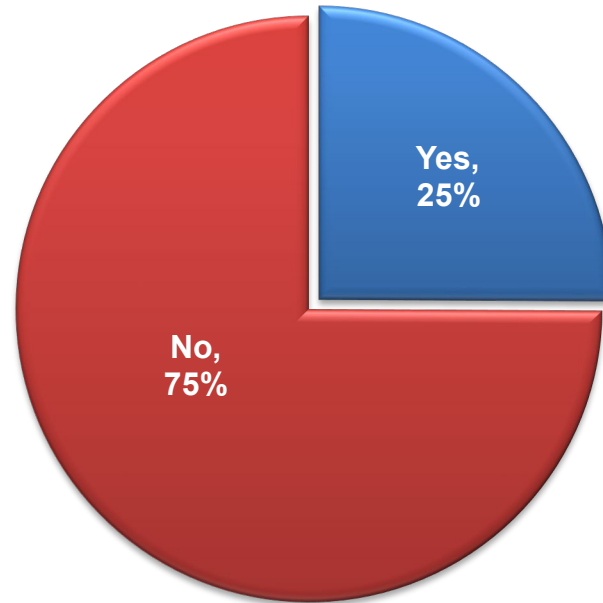
# Department Composition: Average Age\*

- Survey results indicate that the majority of interior firefighters are age 36-50 yrs. old.

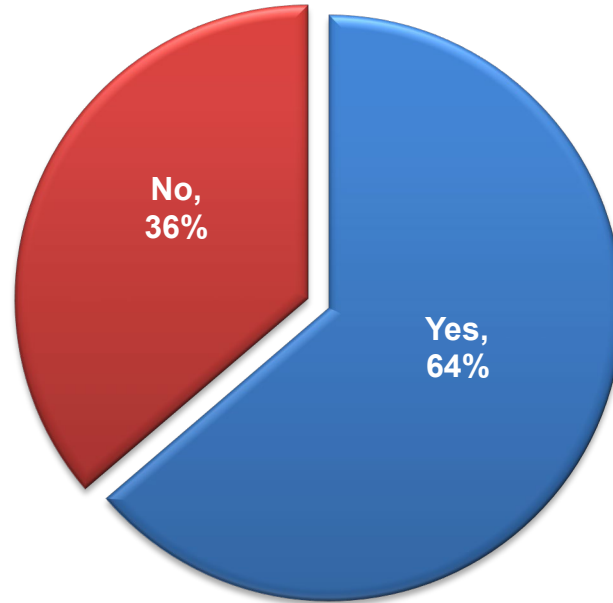


*\* Average age of interior firefighters only. Includes paid and volunteer departments*

# Does Your Agency Operate an Ambulance?

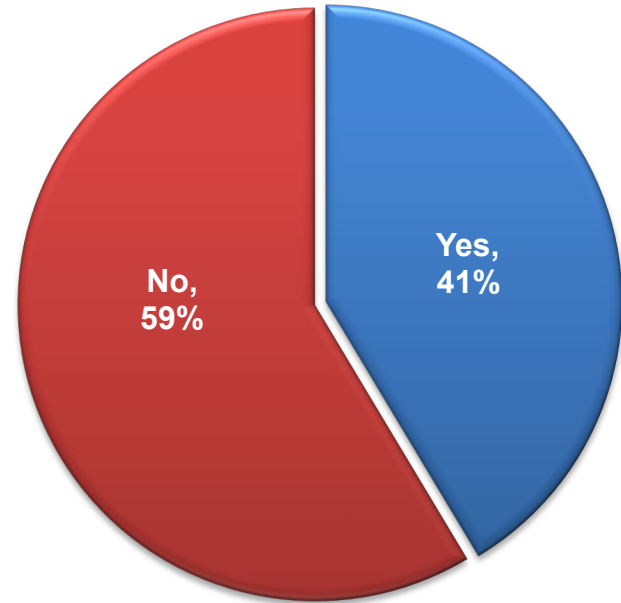


# Does Your Agency Provide First Response EMS?



# Do You Have a Length Of Service Award Program (LOSAP Retirement)?

- 41% of departments reported that they have a Length of Service Award Program.



# As A Fire Chief, What Would Have The Greatest Positive Impact on Your Department Staffing?

- Incentives to attract new members (e.g., tax, financial, loan forgiveness, gas vouchers, etc.).
- Reduction of training requirements
- Length of Service Award Programs (LOSAP)
- Less unfunded mandates
- Pay per call incentive
- More young people joining the fire service
- Younger members being able to afford housing in the fire district
- Financial assistance for recruitment events
- Increased community engagement and outreach
- Allow members to volunteer (career and volunteer status)

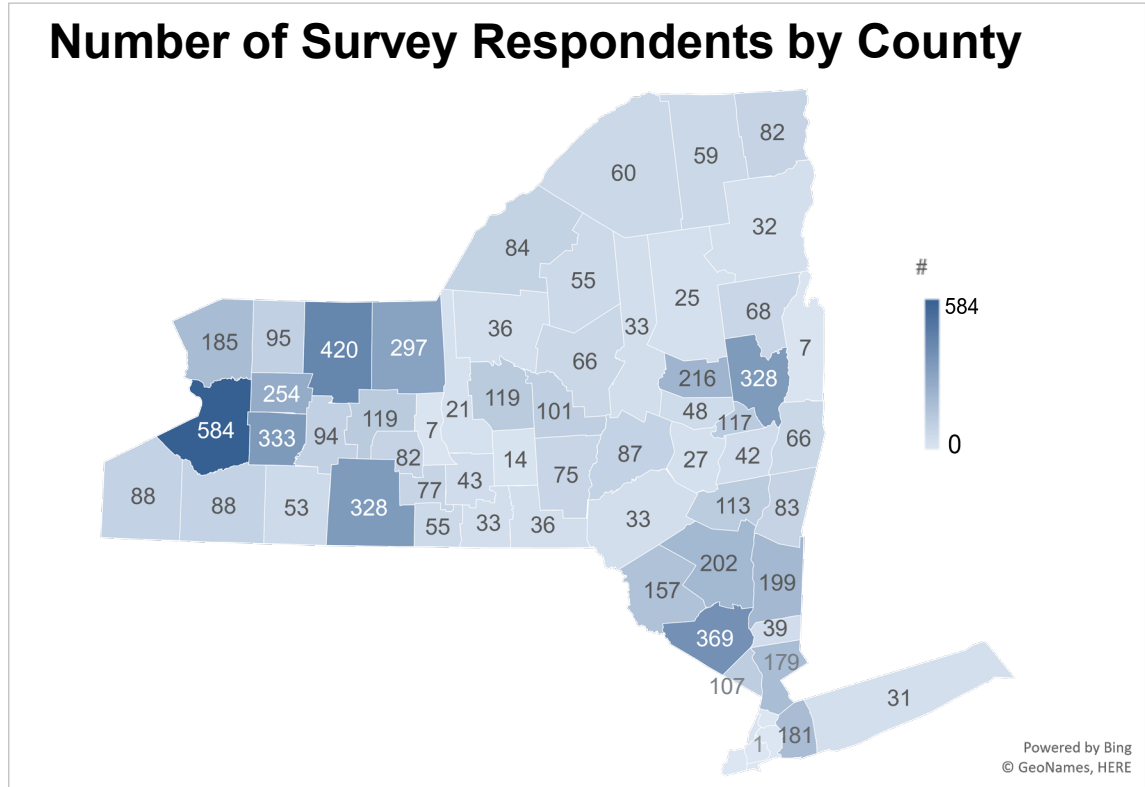
# Volunteer Firefighter Survey Results

# The Survey and the Use of Data

- The following questions were answered by **6,854** volunteer firefighters across New York State
  - **542** Fire Chiefs
  - **731** Assistant Chiefs
  - **631** Captains
  - **590** Lieutenants
  - **4,235** Non-Officer Firefighters or EMS
  - **125** Training Officers

# The Survey and the Use of Data

- **58** of **58** counties completed the survey
- Responses to each question were aggregated to allow for trend analysis





# Key Findings

- **76%** of volunteer firefighters indicated that their department has seen a **significant decrease** in volunteer service participation
- **43%** of respondents cite lack of time as a reason for leaving the volunteer service
- **30%** of respondents reported that time commitment is the largest challenge that volunteers face
- Income tax breaks (**26%**) and property tax breaks (**24%**) were reported as the best ways to address volunteer recruitment and retention
- **18%** of respondents think recruitment activities should be focused on high school career days
- **24%** of respondents reported that State Income Tax breaks would impact their retention

# Has Your Fire/EMS Department Seen a Significant Decrease in Volunteers?

- **76%** reported a significant decrease in volunteers\*
- **24%** reported that there was no significant decrease in volunteers\*

Position	My Department Has Seen a Significant Decrease in Volunteers
Chief	Yes: 80%
Assistant Chief	Yes: 80%
Captain	Yes: 78%
Lieutenant	Yes: 77%
Non-Officer Firefighter or EMS	Yes: 75%
Training Officer	Yes: 86%

# Why Do You Think Individuals Leave the Volunteer Service?



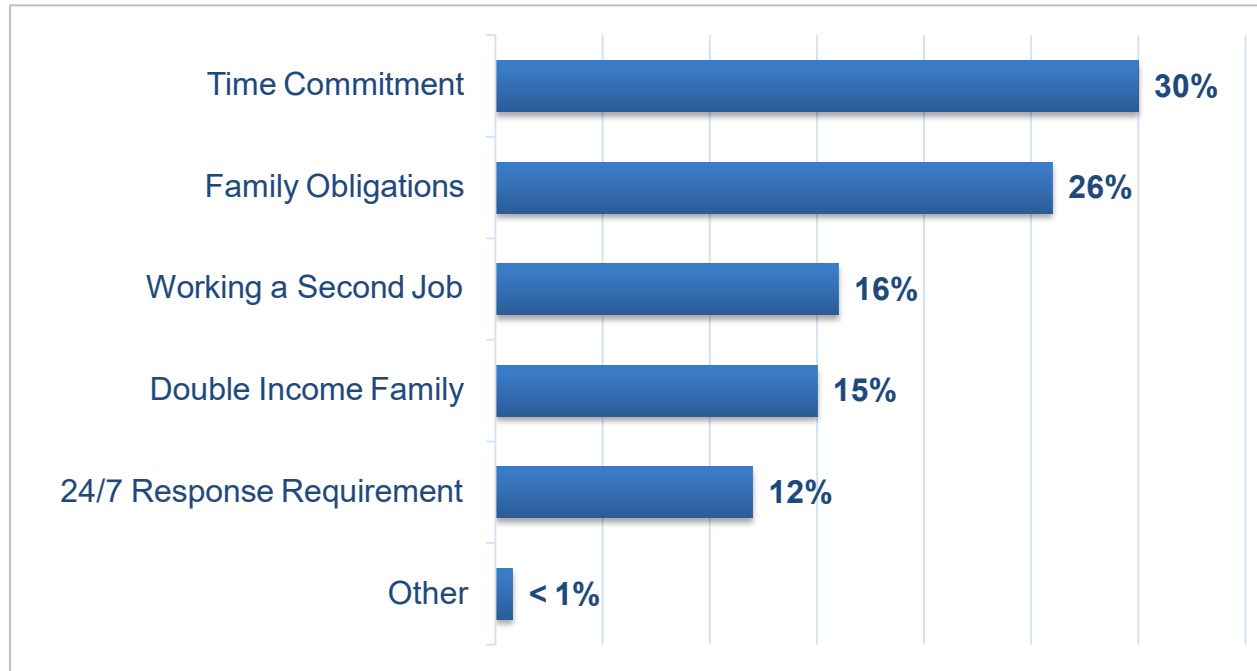
*For those that chose 'Other', answers included responses such as:*

- *College Commitments*
- *Lack of Calls*
- *Age Gap*

\* # of respondents: 6,854

\* On average, respondents selected 4 options

# What Challenges do Today's Volunteers Face?



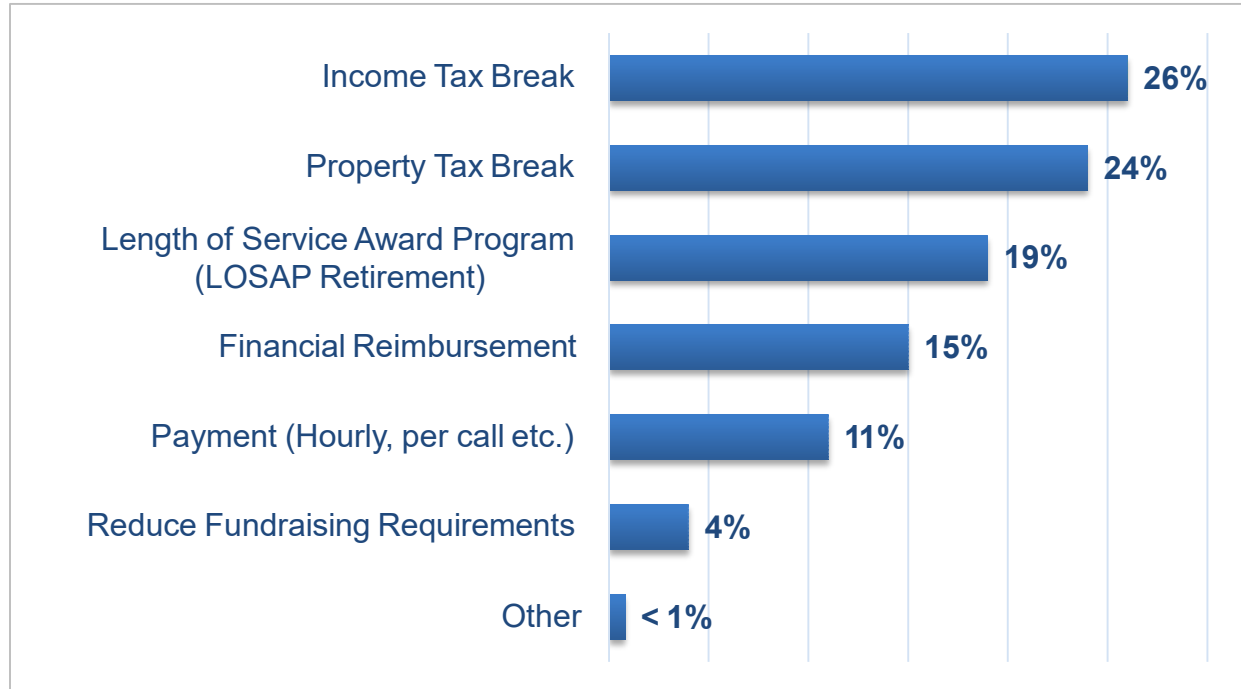
*For those that chose 'Other', answers included responses such as:*

- *College Commitments*
- *Internal Conflicts*
- *Increasing Training Requirements*

\* # of respondents: 6,854

\* On average, respondents selected 3 options

# How Should Recruitment & Retention be Addressed?



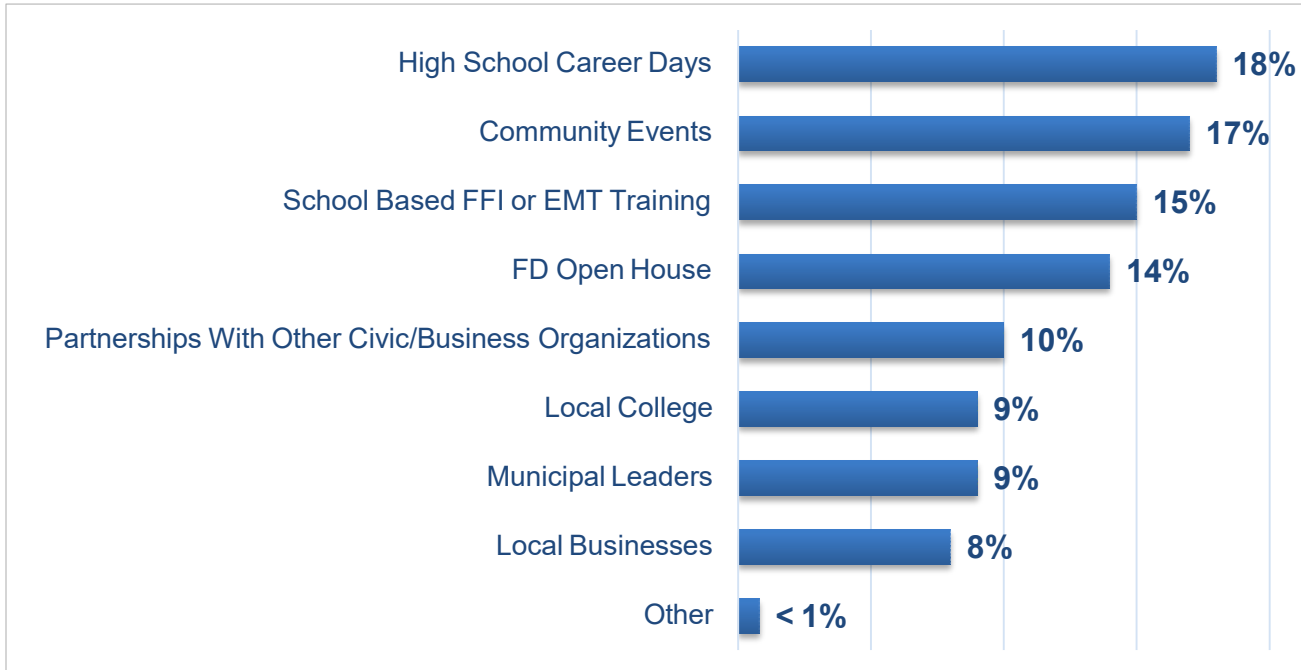
*For those that chose 'Other', answers included responses such as:*

- *Member Recognition*
- *Local/In-House Trainings*
- *Reduce Training Requirements*

\* # of respondents: 6,854

\* On average, respondents selected 3 options

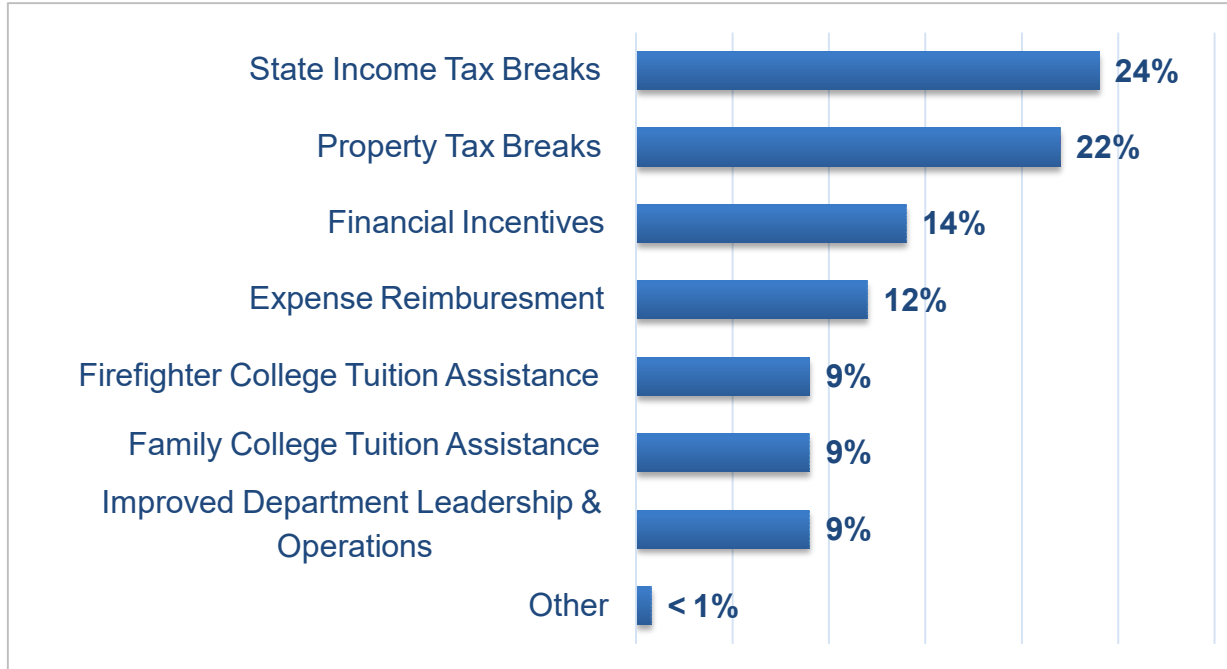
# Where Should Recruitment Activities be Focused?



*For those that chose 'Other', answers included responses such as:*

- *Youth Programs*

# As a Current Volunteer, What Would Impact Your Retention?



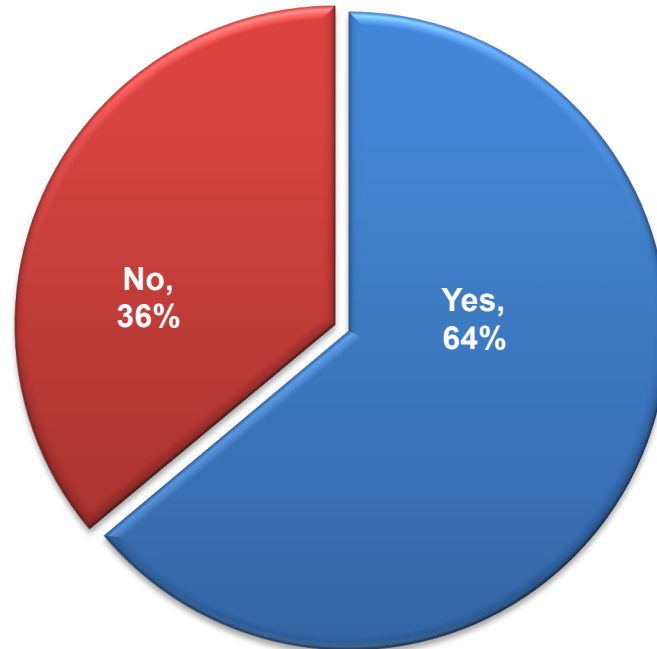
*For those that chose 'Other', answers included responses such as:*

- *Community Recognition*
- *Medical Coverage*
- *Member Bonding Activities*
- *Retirement Programs*
- *Revision of Trainings*

\* # of respondents: 6,854

\* On average, respondents selected 3 options

# Has Your Department Participated With the FASNY Recruit NY Campaign?



\* # of respondents: 6,854



# What Have Been the Results from the FASNY Recruit NY Campaign?

The majority of responses displayed negative sentiment

- **415** respondents used the words “Very Poor”, “Poor” or “Not Good”
- **276** respondents said “No New Recruits”
- **223** respondents indicated they recruited “a few new members”
- **215** said “I don’t know” or “Unknown”
- **3** respondents said “Great”
- **47** respondents used the word “Good”
- **22** respondents indicated that results have been “Positive”

# What Improvements/Suggestions Do You Have for the Program?

- Increase the frequency of advertising. Promote on a year-round basis.
- Better use of social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook)
- Promote fire service at non-fire specific community events and functions (e.g., county fair, career days, parades, job fairs).
- Partner with local community, civic and religious groups. Support each other and boost collective engagement/participation in the organizations.
- More direct/targeted outreach to individuals within the community.

# What Improvements/Suggestions Do You Have for the Program?

- Work with local HS and colleges; offer volunteer opportunities or college credits, as appropriate.
- Target younger individuals (e.g., explorers, junior programs).
- Provide additional financial resources to improve outreach events and purchase promotional/educational materials
- Remove barriers for entry (e.g., make sign-up easier, reduce training requirements)
- Update the marketing strategy
- Better highlight the personal growth, skills, and sense of community members recognize
- Explore financial, tax and health benefits for members

# Fire Coordinators Survey Results

# Key Findings

- Data shows that there are **61** fully career fire departments, **57** combination fire departments and **1,710** volunteer fire departments in New York State.\*
- Of the jurisdictions that have career fire departments, **51%** do not allow volunteering.
- Volunteer fire departments provide **the majority of ambulance operations** in jurisdictions, following by non-fire Volunteers.
- There has been rather **consistent fire department consolidation since 1996**, however there's been a slight uptick in the past decade.
- Data shows that there's been an **increase** in the number of **EMS agency closures in the past decade**.

*\*Based on analysis from survey results*

# Fire Department by Type

## Fully Career Fire Departments

3% -- 61 departments



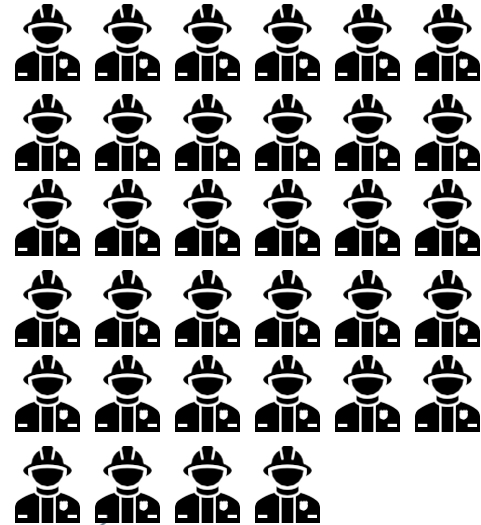
## Combination Fire Departments

3% -- 57 departments

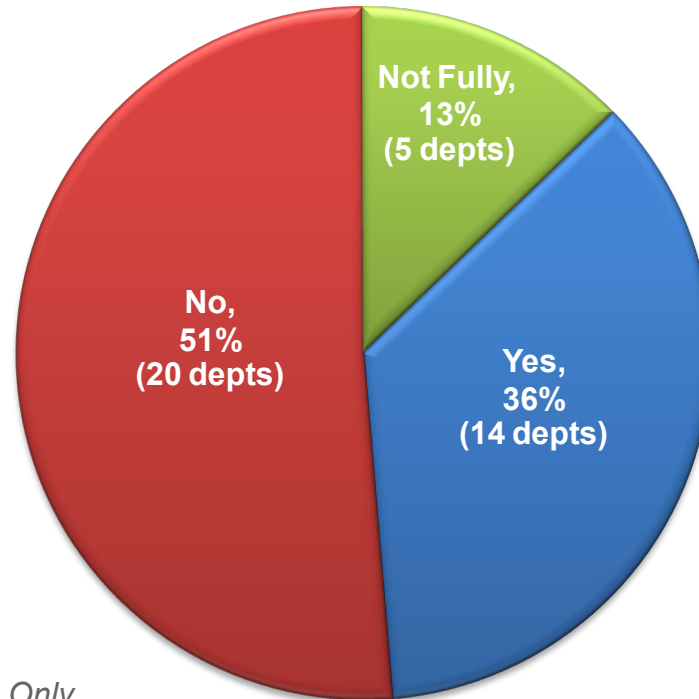


## Volunteer Fire Departments

94% -- 1,710 departments

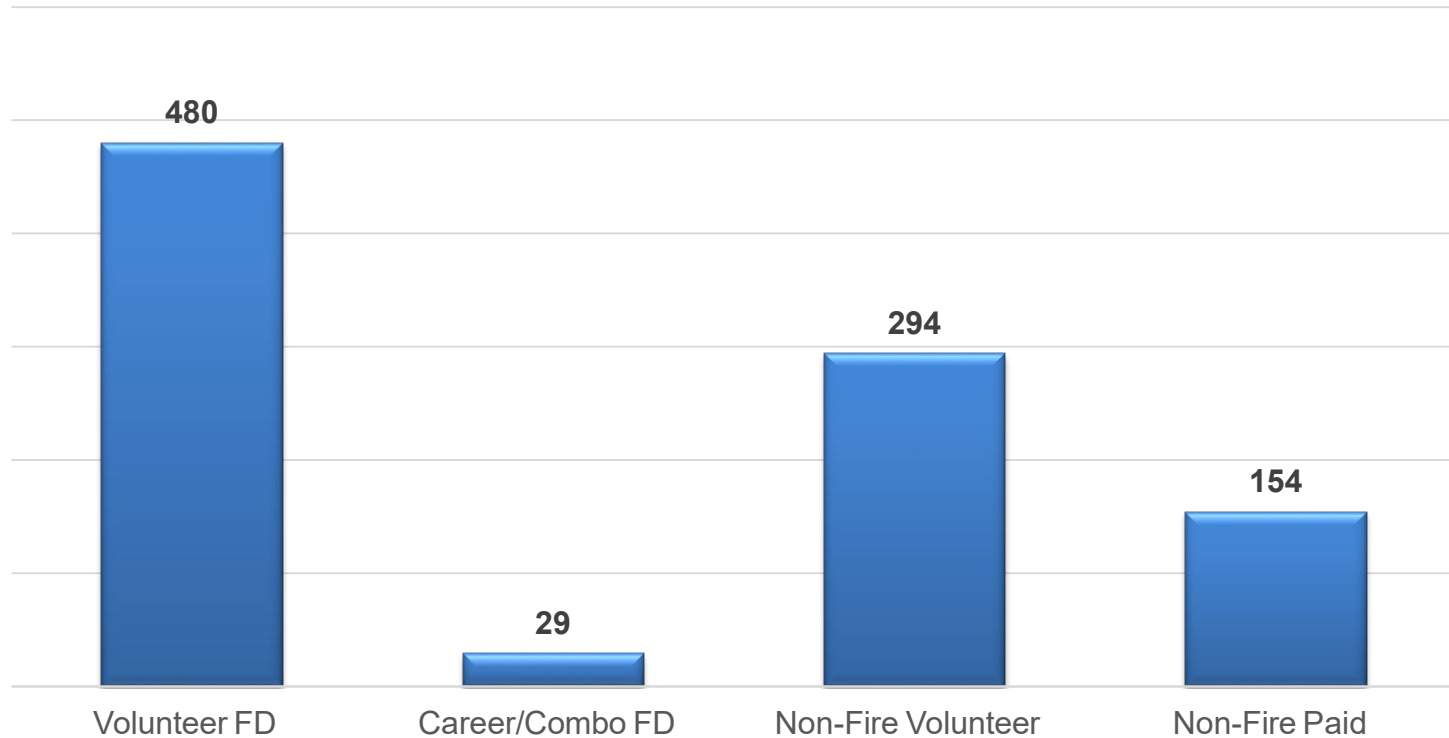


# Do Career Fire Departments in Your Jurisdiction Allow Volunteering?



*Note: 19 counties do not have Career FDs. Only displays responses from remaining 39 counties*

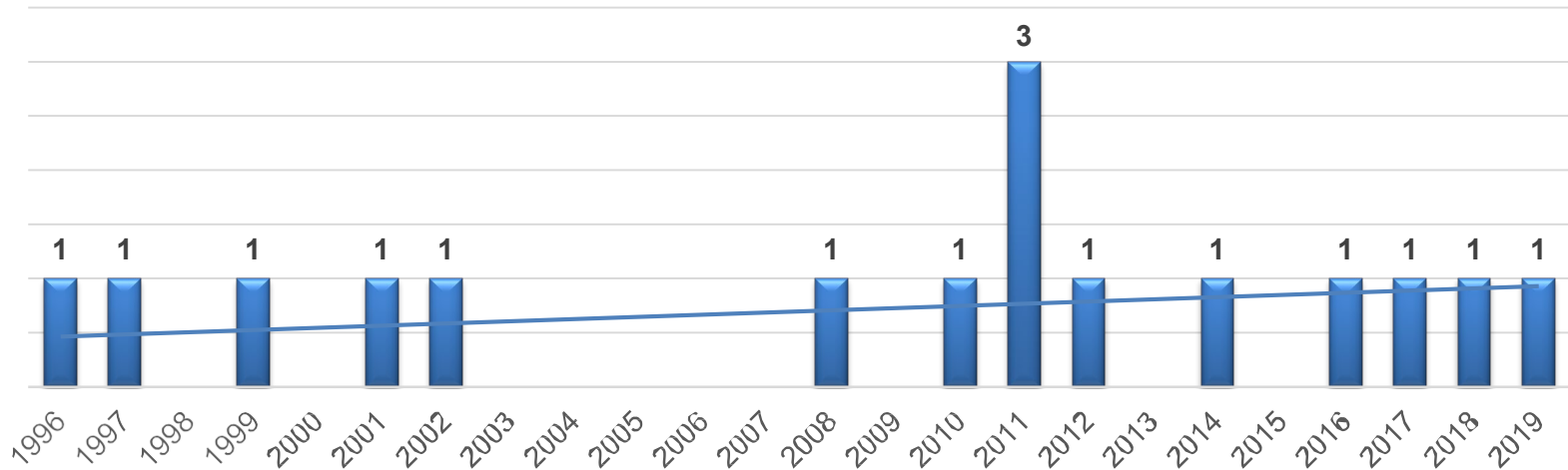
# Ambulance Operation by Fire Department Type





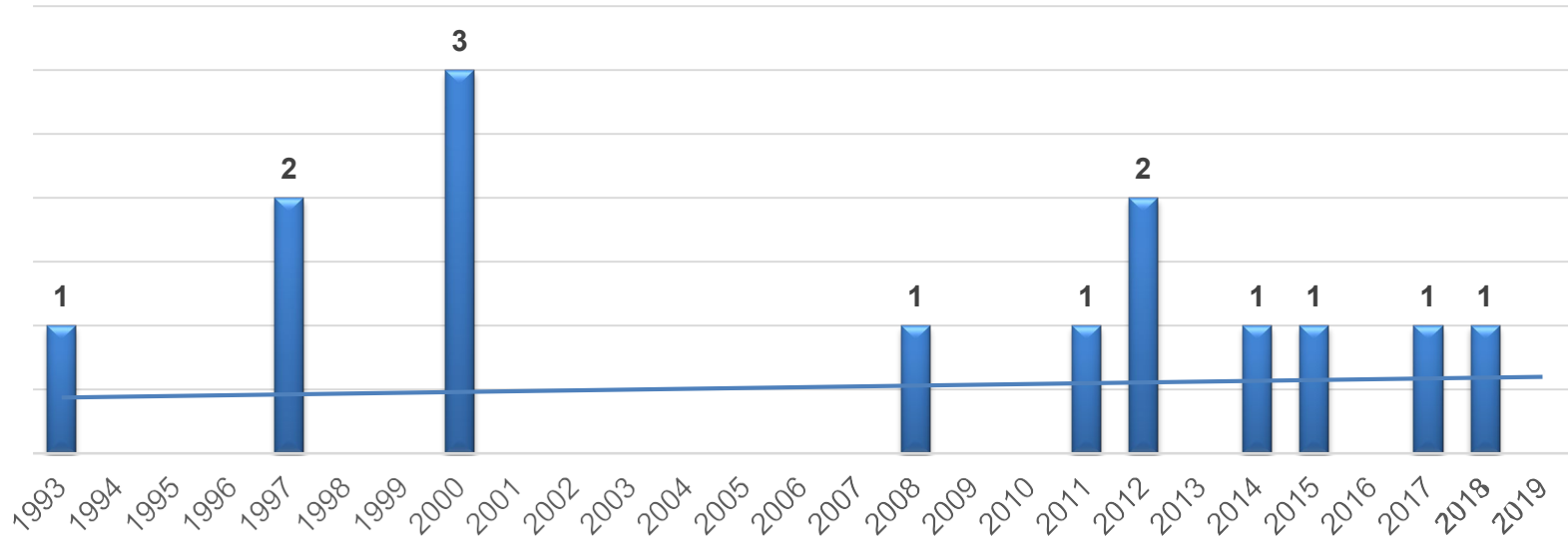
# Fire Department Consolidation Stats

- **Earliest Reported Consolidation:** 1996
- **Most Recent Consolidation:** 2019
  - Trend shows rather consistent consolidation since 1996. There's been a bit of an uptick in the past decade.



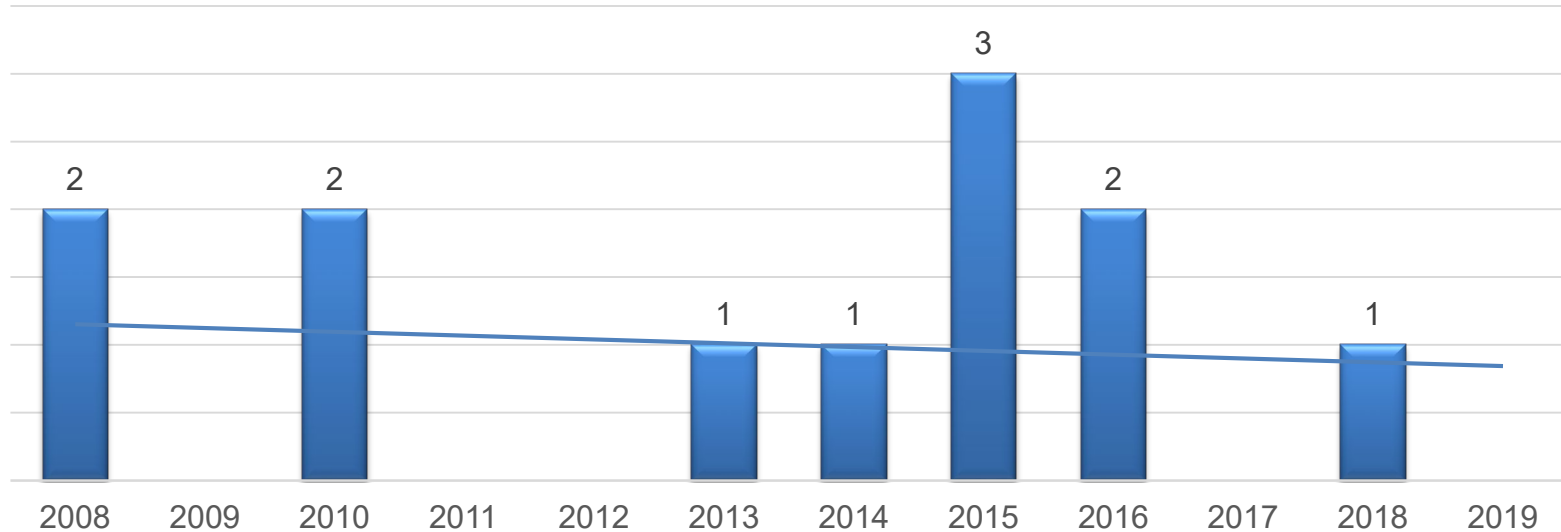
# Fire Department Closure Stats

- *Earliest Reported Consolidation: 1993*
- *Most Recent Consolidation: 2018*



# EMS Consolidation Stats

- *Earliest Reported Consolidations: 2008*
- *Most Recent Consolidation: 2018*



# EMS Closures Stats

- **Earliest Reported Consolidations:** 1996
- **Most Recent Consolidation:** 2019
  - Trend shows an increase in the number of EMS Agency closures in the past decade.
  - There are several (5-10) pending EMS Agency consolidations or closures.

