

Governor Phil Murphy

Acting Governor Scutari Signs Firefighters Chaplain Bill Into Law

08/28/2023

RAHWAY– Acting Governor Nicholas Scutari today signed A-5275/S-3671, providing municipal governing bodies more flexibility in appointing chaplains to their fire departments.

Under current law, the governing body of any municipality, by ordinance, may provide for the appointment of one or more ordained members of the clergy as chaplains to the paid or part-paid fire department and force of the municipality, with the rank of battalion chief and their salaries fixed by the governing body. The bill provides that, for any municipal fire department and force chaplain initially appointed after enactment, the municipality may specify in the ordinance appointing the chaplain whether the chaplain will have a rank and salary. The bill also codifies job protections for any chaplain employed prior to the bill’s enactment; they cannot be dismissed, nor can their salary be diminished, except for specified causes.

“Chaplains provide an invaluable service for local fire departments and the communities they serve,” **said Acting Governor Scutari**. “They support the men and women who put their lives on the line when protecting the safety of the residents. This law enables local government to appoint fire chaplains that meet their needs without undue expense.”

Primary sponsors of the bill include Senators Linda R. Greenstein and Shirley K. Turner and Assemblymembers Daniel R. Benson and Reginald W. Atkins.

“Fully supporting our first responders is a top priority for me, including making changes to increase opportunities for the critical role of chaplain,” **said Senator Linda Greenstein**. “Now, fire houses can expand this role, or have the flexibility to tailor this role to the needs of their communities.”

“New Jersey is home to people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs,” **said Senator Turner.** “By creating the position of Fire Chaplain and allowing greater flexibility for municipalities, we can help ensure firefighters around the state have access to a chaplain that shares their faith.”

“This law will enable municipalities in New Jersey to determine the most appropriate compensation for chaplains or those who volunteer in their fire departments to offer spiritual and personal counseling to the men and women who come to our aid on our worst days,” **said Assemblyman Dan Benson.** “The new measure will enable local governments to make the best decisions for their communities and first responders.”

“Whether they are volunteers or paid staff, fire chaplains perform an important job aiding and comforting firefighters and their families during trying times,” **said Assemblyman Reginald Atkins.** “Giving municipalities the flexibility to decide the job parameters for a newly appointed fire department chaplain is the right thing to do.”

“Fire Department chaplains are an integral part of New Jersey’s fire service,” **said Eddie Donnelly, President, NJ FMBA.** “Whether supporting our members and families in times of need or being that consoling voice at a memorial service the NJ FMBA appreciates our Fire Chaplains. Thank you Senator Greenstein and Assemblyman Benson for sponsoring our Bill. Thank you, Acting Governor Scutari for memorializing this piece of legislation today.”

“This bill amends the law to allow municipalities to create the position of Fire Chaplain without a requirement of salary or rank. This gives municipalities the freedom to create the position of Fire Chaplain without financial concerns and civil service requirements,” **said Deacon Bob Tharp.** “The Fire Chaplain can be an important lifeline to firefighters in dealing with the stresses that are inherent in their daily work as well as being there to support them in dealing with situations involving severe trauma or loss of life. They can also be there to offer support to members of the community when faced with life changing situations.”

“At a time when it is challenging to attract and retain people to serve as firefighters, particularly volunteers, this bill provides necessary flexibility regarding fire chaplains,” **said Robert Ordway, President of the NJ State Firemen’s Association.** “As the relief association for 54,000 members of career and volunteer firefighters, we support smart public policy to recruit, train and protect the safety of firefighters at all ranks, and which, in this case, also brings equal treatment under the law of both police and firefighter chaplains. We commend the Legislative sponsors, Governor’s Office and Acting Governor Scutari for their efforts to enact this law.”

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