For immediate release

From the Rombout Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners

**Open letter to Rombout Fire District residents**

Recently, the Rombout Fire Commissioners received an email concerning the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OHSA) proposed rule changes concerning the operation of fire departments. The email stated the following. “In February, OSHA published a proposed rule that will revise the current 29 CFR 1910.156  “Fire Brigade” standard to make it a multi-discipline “Emergency Response” standard that would require fire departments, EMS agencies, and other rescue services to comply with a wide range of responder safety and health initiatives. This will have far-reaching and possibly devastating effects on Fire Districts and Fire Departments across New York State. It is imperative that you understand the impacts that this could have on your budget, the number of members, and the long-term sustainability of your organization”. This was an email from Dave Denniston, Vice President of the Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York.

The Rombout Fire District Fire Commissioners are greatly alarmed and concerned that these proposed rules will have on the recruitment and retention of firefighters and the effect that it would have on our budget with the increased training and equipment requirements. ﻿Following the tragic attacks of September 11, OSHA, with all Federal agencies, were directed to strengthen their preparedness to respond to terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies. Because OSHA released the new proposal this January 2024 with a 90 day public comment session, The Dutchess County Board of Fire Commissioners, with the Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York (AFDSNY) and the National Volunteer Firefighter Council (NVFC) agreed that this was not enough time to fully understand the 608 page new standard rule changes and how it would impact each and every one of the fire districts in the New York State. They successfully lobbied to push back the date for public comments to June 21. OSHA wants to fully implement these changes in 2026.

The Rombout Fire Commissioners do agree that many of these updates are long overdue to the 44 year old “Fire Brigade Standard” to meet the new technology and technical advances that have evolved in that time. This new standard will help safeguard the health and safety of our members while serving our community. But the fire commissioners also have a responsibility to the Rombout taxpayers to be fiscally responsible without putting undue financial pressures on them. The increased training requirements, required new equipment, administrative and health costs, will do just that. The major OSHA directive from Congress was to formulate a standard that is economically and technically feasible. The Fire Commissioners have significant questions as to whether the entire proposed standard falls within these guidelines. OSHA approach is one size fits all fire departments. A report by NYS State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli reported “New York’s system for providing fire protection is surprisingly complex”. He continued “The bravery and dedication that firefighting personnel exhibit on a daily basis – often on a volunteer basis – is of great benefit to the State’s residents”. If this proposed standard goes through ALL fire departments across New York, Dutchess County and the nation will need to comply with it. The members of Rombout Fire Company helps contribute to reducing costs to the New York State taxpayer. FASNY reports that New York State’s nearly 100,000 volunteer firefighters (65% of fire departments in this nation are volunteer departments) save New York taxpayers $3.87 billion annually in salary and benefits, and potential debt service. FASNY also added that property taxes across the state would rise on average 26.5 percent to cover the added costs (taxes would rise between 3.3% and 123% depending on the county), which would include hiring paid firefighters and acquiring new equipment and buildings.

Rombout Fire District protect 50% of the area in the Town of Fishkill 24/7/365 with highly trained 100% unpaid personnel. The district is primarily an urban community that responds to 500 to 600 emergencies per year. The types of calls that we respond to are motor vehicle accidents on Interstate 84, the major thoroughfares of Routes 9, 52 and 82, the huge GAP warehouse, multiple story buildings at Westage Business Center and the 2000+ acres Sharpe Reservation. What our firefighters respond to are quite different compared to the rural part of Dutchess County where they respond to building and brush fires, agricultural accidents and vehicle accidents. Rombout does need to use tower ladder trucks, they do not. They need water tanker trucks because of limited use of fire hydrants, Rombout does not. When you compare the equipment and training needed, and how the departments fund it, the fire departments are totally different. But our mission is the same, to serve our community.

If these propose rules go through, there is an initial estimate cost of $8 billion in New York State to update stations and apparatus to the new standard IN ADDITION TO the taxpayers current annual costs. If these propose rules are implemented in two years, it is almost guaranteed that those costs will rise by that time. Preliminary estimates for the Rombout Fire District is that residents would see a severe increase for fire protection on their tax bill.

**We are asking for your support and if you are a New York State residence, by signing a petition against this new proposed regulations. To sign this petition, click on this link**

<https://www.change.org/p/call-to-action-osha-1910-156?recruiter=1334481811&recruited_by_id=246a7570-e538-11ee-929f-65b5e0d33f50&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=petition_dashboard&utm_medium=copylink>

For 53 years, the men and women of Rombout Fire Company have followed the proud American tradition of being volunteer firefighters that dates back to 1736. Every day and night they respond to your call during your greatest time of need. You can be assured that we will continue to do so until these new regulations have been resolved so that it benefits both the firefighters and our community that we serve and live in.

Respectively yours,

Rombout Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners