



Office of the State Comptroller

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New Jersey Fire Districts Reduced Firefighter Salaries, but Continue to Hold Elections in February, State Comptroller Follow-up Report Finds

TRENTON – A follow-up report released today from the State Comptroller’s Office finds that the Cherry Hill and Woodbridge fire districts have achieved overall salary reductions for firefighters through collective bargaining agreements. The salary reductions follow OSC’s original 2014 audit which found firefighters in Woodbridge and Cherry Hill were earning more than the New Jersey state average and more than New York City and Philadelphia firefighters.

Cherry Hill and Woodbridge have also made strides towards saving taxpayer dollars by eliminating longevity payments to firefighters – payments made to employees with more than six years of service. Additionally, Woodbridge implemented OSC’s recommendation to eliminate a terminal leave benefit in which firefighters receive bonus pay upon retirement. That terminal leave benefit is now capped for existing employees and has been eliminated for all new employees.

Each fire district in New Jersey is governed by a Board of Fire Commissioners who are elected by voters on the third Saturday in February. Voters also have the opportunity to approve fire districts’ budgets in that election. OSC’s original audit found that fewer than two percent of voters participated in fire district elections. As a result, OSC recommended that the Legislature consider aligning fire district elections with the general elections held in November.

Although the Legislature enacted a law allowing fire districts to move elections to November, OSC’s follow-up review found that only Cherry Hill moved its election while Brick and Woodbridge fire districts have kept their elections in February. As noted by OSC in its initial report, synchronizing fire district elections with the general elections in November would increase voter participation and increase awareness and transparency of fire district operations and budget – not to mention save taxpayer money

spent on holding a separate election.

The full follow-up review can be found [here](#), and OSC's original 2014 audit can be found [here](#).

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