



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

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**In Visit to Bethlehem Fire Department, Governor Shapiro Highlights
Plan to Increase State Support for Pennsylvania Firefighters**

Following the arson attack on the Pennsylvania Governor's residence, Governor Shapiro continues to thank first responders and call for more support for our firefighters, who are stretched thin right now.

Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 proposed budget includes a new \$30 million competitive grant program to help fire companies purchase life-saving equipment and recruit and retain firefighters.



Harrisburg, PA – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** visited the **Bethlehem Memorial Fire Station** to thank first responders for their work and highlight key proposals in his [2025-26 proposed budget](#) aimed at strengthening fire companies and preventing disasters before they happen.

In the face of significant danger, Pennsylvania's professional and volunteer firefighters continue to rise to the challenge, responding to more calls even as their ranks decline. That's why the Governor is continuing to advocate for more state support to help firefighters get the equipment, personnel, and resources they need to build safer communities for all Pennsylvanians.

Governor Shapiro has witnessed firsthand how firefighters run towards danger to keep us safe. Yesterday, the Governor and the First Family [joined Chef Robert Irvine](#) and the Robert Irvine Foundation at Harrisburg Bureau of Fire Station 1 to thank the firefighters who responded to the arson attack at the Pennsylvania Governor's Residence on April 13th.

"This weekend, our family witnessed the incredible bravery and excellence of our firefighters and first responders," said **Governor Shapiro**. "These brave firefighters run towards danger everyday to keep Pennsylvanians safe, and we need to do right by them. That's why my proposed budget takes concrete steps to support our firefighters, creating a new competitive funding stream to help them purchase new equipment, covering yearly cancer screenings for firefighters, and creating a pilot program to help

municipal fire companies work together. I've seen the best of our firefighters this week and I'm going to continue to work to ensure the Commonwealth has their backs."

The **Bethlehem Fire Department** responds to more than 5,200 calls annually across four stations, employing over 104 professional firefighters represented by International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 735. The Department also has specialized teams with enhanced capabilities to provide hazardous materials mitigation, water rescue, and hazardous device disposal.

Under **Governor Shapiro's** leadership, the Commonwealth has invested over \$60,000 in the Bethlehem Fire Department – funding that has been put to use to purchase essential items like vehicle extrication equipment to help with removing crash victims from vehicles and new firefighting foam that doesn't contain PFAS chemicals.

While there is a foundation of support for fire companies like Bethlehem at the state level, the current system makes it hard for companies to make a single big purchase or equipment upgrade – especially for resources like new fire trucks that cost more than the state's current grant program would provide. That's why **Governor Shapiro's** 2025-26 budget proposal includes three major initiatives to continue to support and sustain Pennsylvania's fire service:

- **Creating a new \$30 million competitive grant program** for fire companies to help them purchase life-saving equipment, recruit and retain firefighters, and meet their unique local needs — in addition to the \$30 million that is already distributed to fire companies annually.
- **Establishing a pilot program** to help municipal fire companies work together and share resources more efficiently through cooperative service models.
- **Covering annual cancer screenings for firefighters**, recognizing the chemical exposures and health risks they face on the job.

"Governor Shapiro's call for an additional \$30 million in competitive grant funding for fire companies is absolutely vital," said **Michael Reich, Fire Chief for the City of Bethlehem Fire Department**. "This funding will empower departments across the state to invest in equipment, recruit and retain our skilled firefighters, and, most importantly, fund much-needed cancer screenings. The reality is that firefighters face a significantly elevated risk of cancer, and the Governor's proposed cancer screening funding is a critical step toward ensuring early detection and treatment for these brave first responders."

"We represent over 7,000 first responders every day, advocating for our brothers and sisters — whether in Harrisburg or Washington, D.C. — to improve the safety and well-being of those who show up 24 hours a day, 365 days a year," said **President Bob Brooks, Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association**. "I've gotten to know Governor Shapiro well over the years. He's no stranger to standing with first responders. He was with us last year when we enacted benefits for post-traumatic stress injuries — legislation championed by Representative O'Mara, who's with us

today. That was a long, bipartisan battle, and we got it done. But there's still more work ahead. Emergency management starts at the local level, where first responders play vital public safety roles. The challenges we face — rising costs, lack of volunteers and resources — aren't new. We can't fund public safety one bake sale at a time. We need to prioritize it at budget time, and Governor Shapiro clearly has. That's why we're proud to support the Governor's proposal for \$30 million in competitive grants to help fire companies meet a range of needs, including recruitment and retention."

"Governor Shapiro has passed two bipartisan budgets that give municipalities what they need. That's easier said than done — it's not just about money, it's about understanding what a township, a borough, or a city needs, and what the people need," said **Bethlehem Mayor J. William Reynolds**. "We've seen bipartisan budgets that give local officials confidence the state will be there. Sometimes we hesitate to act locally because we're unsure what kind of collaboration will come from the state — but Governor Shapiro is a leader in that way. That's what today is about — people showing up when it matters, and an administration working with all of us to help the great people of this Commonwealth."

"Making sure our firefighters have state of the art equipment to keep them safe is just as important as making sure our firefighters can get needed cancer screenings," said **Senator Lisa Boscola**. "This is dangerous work they do and we all benefit from their courage. I am proud to stand with the Governor to support our first responders."

"Investing in our fire companies is the least we can do to not only protect our communities but to also support first responders, who put their lives on the line daily," said **Representative Jennifer O'Mara**. "I'm thankful for Governor Shapiro's budget proposals to support our fire fighters and keep Pennsylvanians safe, and now it's time we deliver."

"Our first responders, including our firefighters, are vital in ensuring that those in our community stay safe and can continue to provide for their families, themselves, and our economy," said **Representative Jeanne McNeill**. "I believe that Governor Shapiro's proposed budget will continue to fund our firefighters here in the Lehigh Valley and all of Pennsylvania so our residents can continue to know that our firefighters have the equipment and funding they need to efficiently act to save lives. I look forward to working with my colleagues in budget season to secure this public safety funding for our commonwealth."

Governor Shapiro's proposed investments in firefighters build on a strong foundation of support that he has already delivered on:

- In the **2024-25 budget**, the Governor invested **\$37.5 million** in grants to over 2,500 local fire and EMS departments, supporting equipment, training, facility upgrades, and operational costs.
- In his first budget, the Governor secured an increase to the 911 surcharge, from \$1.65 to \$1.95 — increasing critical emergency funding for all 61 emergency call

centers across the Commonwealth and strengthening emergency services in all 67 counties.

- In October 2024, the Governor signed legislation expanding worker's compensation to include post-traumatic stress injuries for Pennsylvania's first responders. The law will take effect in October 2025.

The **Shapiro Administration** remains focused on delivering for Pennsylvania's first responders — ensuring firefighters have the tools, training, and support they need to protect their neighbors and communities, today and into the future.

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