

ASSEMBLY BILL No. 2593

To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 2593 with my recommendations for reconsideration.

Under current law, municipalities and fire districts prepare and adopt local fire mutual aid plans to coordinate the effective use of resources. These plans are designed to ensure that proper planning criteria, command support, and coordination measures are established to guide fire fighters when more than one municipality, fire district, or fire department responds to an emergency. This bill would amend current law to explicitly require local fire mutual aid plans to establish a command structure that includes deputy chiefs and battalion chiefs.

I support the sponsors' efforts to ensure that a clearly designated and delineated command structure is established prior to emergency situations necessitating mutual aid. Without question, proper planning and effective preparedness are essential to preserving and protecting our citizens in times of emergency. Indeed, New Jersey's emergency preparedness and response capabilities were never more tested than they were immediately before, during, and after Superstorm Sandy. Despite the incomparable severity of Sandy, the collective efforts of our municipal, county, and State-level fire, police, EMS, and emergency management personnel demonstrated, once again, the unparalleled professionalism, efficiency, dedication, and selflessness of our emergency first responders.

Nonetheless, I am concerned that this bill may not afford municipalities and fire districts sufficient flexibility to establish plans best suited to their individual needs. Moreover, I am concerned that by explicitly delineating the

chain of command in State statute, current municipal arrangements concerning incident command support could be unnecessarily disrupted. One of the most pertinent lessons learned from Superstorm Sandy is that State and local first responders need to have the authority to react with agility to the rapidly changing circumstances that accompany catastrophic events. Unfortunately, without further study and analysis, I cannot be certain that the changes proposed in this bill advance that goal.

Accordingly, I recommend that the Director of the Division of Fire Safety in the Department of Community Affairs undertake a review of the laws, rules, and regulations concerning the preparation and adoption of local fire mutual aid plans, and the coordination and deployment of fire service resources during an emergency where mutual aid is necessary or appropriate. The Director shall develop findings and recommendations on whether revisions to existing procedures concerning local fire mutual aid plans are necessary, including whether a statutorily delineated chain of command is appropriate and necessary. The Director shall report such findings and recommendations directly to me no later than six months after the enactment of this bill.

Therefore, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 2593 and recommend that it be amended as follows:

<u>Page 2, Title, Line 2:</u>	Delete "amending" and insert "supplementing"
<u>Page 2, Section 1, Lines 7-34:</u>	Delete in their entirety
<u>Page 2, Line 35:</u>	Insert new section 1: "1. The Director of the Division of Fire Safety in the Department of Community Affairs shall undertake a review of the laws, rules, and regulations concerning the preparation and adoption of local fire mutual aid plans, and

the coordination and deployment of fire service resources during an emergency where mutual aid is necessary or appropriate. The Director shall develop findings and recommendations on whether revisions to existing procedures concerning local fire mutual aid plans are necessary, including whether a statutorily delineated chain of command is appropriate and needed. The Director shall report such findings and recommendations to the Governor no later than six months from the date of enactment of this act."

Page 2, Section 2, Line 36:

Delete "on the first day of the fourth month" and insert "immediately."

Page 2, Section 2, Line 37:

Delete in its entirety

Respectfully,

/s/ Chris Christie

Governor

[seal]

Attest:

/s/ Charles B. McKenna

Chief Counsel to the Governor