Clarkstown health plan offering to volunteers encounters problems

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The Journal News

A recent Clarkstown Town Board resolution authorizing emergency services volunteers to participate in the town's health care plan isn't receiving the expected accolades from those it intends to benefit.

A handful of volunteer ambulance corps workers and firefighters who inquired about the benefit found that they couldn't actually participate in it because of a legal loophole that stems from a faulty state law. The Town Board was aware of the flaw, but still passed the resolution as an expression of good intentions toward volunteers, said Ken Seltman, director of finance for the town.

"It's just as bad as when they offered a 10 percent tax break on county taxes, and it came out to 20 or 30 dollars a year," said an angry Cliff Goodman, a long-time member of the New City Ambulance Corps who is currently unemployed and is struggling to pay for health insurance for himself and his wife. "They made a big deal about it."

To be fair, the fault isn't the town's.

Clarkstown's Dec. 16 Town Board resolution came in response to a New York state law passed in October that authorized municipalities to offer health insurance buy in options to volunteer EMT and firefighters. The law, however, did not correspondingly amend the Civil Service Law that would allow the New York State Health Insurance Plan, or NYSHIP, to be offered to volunteers. NYSHIP provides health care insurance to 900 New York municipalities and quasi-government agencies.

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