

I received my first stipend check today for being an active live-in volunteer at the College Park VFD. I had heard of the program but I did not expect to see a check so soon into living in the Sackroom. While I spent time before the start of the semester saving up money to pay expenses like food and clothes, the stipend was incredibly helpful in supplementing this so that I can spend more time focusing on school and working extra shifts.

We are only required to work our two days on/two days off schedule, but I enjoy riding outside of my required time. This becomes difficult when I have to find part-time work; even though housing is free, I still need money for my basic expenses. I was applying to jobs like the crisis hotline center in Hyattsville and local coffee shops that would allow for flexible hours, but this would still take away from time I could be riding at the station. The check comes pretty close to nullifying the need for a part-time job like this. I am no longer applying for other jobs, and will be relying mostly on these checks as income to be used for living expenses.

The value of these stipend checks is obvious for those members who have lived and volunteered in the station for years, but I can now see its value for new members as well. My fellow probationary have not received any yet because they are not turned over aides, but as soon as they do I expect us all to be spending more time at the fire station and less time at other part-time jobs. The stipend checks do not substitute a steady income through work, but for those of us who spend most of our free time running calls at the station, they allow us to focus on staying and volunteering as much as we can in our free time.

- Erik Ridings