



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo, fire officials praise Senate's passage of bill that provides more cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 22, 2015

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ALBANY – The New York State Senate last week passed a bill co-sponsored by Senator Joseph Griffo that would expand benefit coverage for volunteer firefighters who are diagnosed with various forms of cancer linked to their duties.

The overexposure to smoke that volunteer firefighters experience every time they battle flames makes it more likely that they will develop lung cancer. The exposure to smoke and toxic fumes also creates greater risk that a firefighter will develop cancer in other parts of their body, like their esophagus, stomach, blood, intestines and brain.

This legislation ([S3891](#)) would expand existing coverage under the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law to include cancer of the digestive, hematological, lymphatic, urinary, prostate, neurological, breast and reproductive systems. After a volunteer firefighter has entered the fire service upon successfully passing a physical examination that did not reveal any evidence of cancer, it will be presumed that any cancerous conditions that develop later are the result of that firefighter performing their duties, according to the bill.

Senator Griffo, R-Rome, said: "These courageous men and women volunteer everyday to put their lives on the line so that our own lives and homes may be spared from total destruction. They are the first to step up when flames threaten to violently consume everything we have, and so the least we can do is stand up for our volunteer firefighters in the unfortunate event that they one day suffer the painful price of their public service. Our volunteer firemen and women have never abandoned us in moments of crisis, so we should not abandon them."

Last week, the Senate passed this legislation sponsored by Senator Michael Nozzolio, R-Seneca Falls, and co-sponsored by Griffo. But as the bill awaits action in the Assembly, fire officials throughout the state – some who have survived the cancers this very bill aims to cover – are urging the Assembly to follow the Senate’s lead.

Robert McConville, President of the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York, said: “FASNY applauds the New York State Senate and Senator Joseph Griffo for voting in favor of presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters. We volunteer to run into burning buildings, to extinguish burning cars, and to help people in need, but we did not volunteer to get cancer. FASNY urges the New York State Assembly to do the right thing, and to vote this bill into law.”

Former Whitesboro Fire Chief Brian McQueen, and member of FASNY, said: “As a cancer survivor and 39-year volunteer firefighter, I applaud Senator Joseph Griffo, the bill’s sponsor Senator Michael Nozzolio and the Senate for passing this cancer bill for volunteer firefighters in New York State. Firefighters are more susceptible to numerous cancers and are two times more likely to be stricken with cancer than the residents who are not firefighters. This bill will provide assistance to volunteer firefighters stricken with cancer and their families who provide support.”

McQueen added, “Now I ask the State Assembly to step up to the plate and do what's right for their volunteer firefighters. Having healthy firefighters will save our communities from financial hardships when it comes to low retention of firefighters.”

Floyd Fire Chief Dan Schwertfeger, and new President of the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs: “We thank the Senate, the bill’s sponsor Senator Nozzolio, and Senator Griffo for understanding the cancer issue in the fire service and making it a priority from our united concerns. Research states that cancer is the leading threat to the health and safety of our firefighters, and it's time for our Assembly to step up and support those who support them.”

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