



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo and CNY Veterans Outreach Center kickoff annual Cell Phones For Soldiers Collection Drive

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO November 9, 2023

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In honor of Veterans Day and Military Family Appreciation Month and Veterans Day, state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-C-Rome, was joined by the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center today to kick off this year's **Cell Phones For Soldiers** collection drive.

For every donated phone, mobile device or tablet valued at \$5, Cell Phones For Soldiers is able to provide 2.5 hours of free talk time to deployed troops via calling cards. All proceeds from the

recycled devices will be used to buy long distance calling cards and other communication services for troops at home and abroad. Some of the phones collected also will go directly into the hands of veterans in need as a part of a new initiative started by the organization this year. The phones will come with unlimited talk and text.

The collection drive starts today (Nov. 9) and runs through Saturday, Dec. 9. The public can drop off gently used and unwanted cell phones and/or tablets at several public locations throughout Sen. Griffo's district.

Drop-off locations include:

- **Jervis Public Library: 613 N. Washington St., Rome**
- **Adirondack Bank Center: 400 Oriskany St. W., Utica**
- **Central New York Veterans Outreach Center: 726 Washington St., Utica**
- **Utica Public Library: 303 Genesee St., Utica**
- **Chanatry's Hometown Market: 485 French Road, Utica**
- **Bridgewater Municipal Building: 404 NY-8, Bridgewater**
- **Utica State Office Building: 207 Genesee St., Utica**
- **50 Forward Mohawk Valley (Parkway Center): 220 Memorial Pkwy, Utica**
- **New Hartford Public Library: 2 Library Lane, New Hartford**
- **Oneida Public Library: 459 Main St., Oneida**
- **Cazenovia Public Library: 100 Albany St., Cazenovia**
- **Hamilton Public Library: 13 Broad St., Hamilton**
- **West Winfield Library: 179 South St., West Winfield**
- **Sherburne Public Library: 2 E State St., Sherburne**
- **New York Pizzeria: 7 S. Main St., New Berlin**

This is the eighth year that the drive has taken place. Residents throughout Sen. Griffo's district have donated approximately 6,400 devices and have provided troops with approximately 590,000 minutes (9,800 hours) of free calls.

"The upcoming holidays are an especially hard time for our soldiers overseas to be so far away from their families, and the simple sound of a loved one's voice can go a long way to lift up their spirits," **Sen. Griffo said**. "These brave men and women have stepped up to serve our nation. I am proud to once again team up with the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center and Cell Phones for Soldiers to help connect these troops to their families back home."

"I thank Sen. Griffo for once again spearheading this important and worthy cause, **Vincent Scalise, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center executive director, said**. "This annual collection drive has helped many men and women serving in our military connect with their families and loved ones during the holidays and throughout the year. It is my hope that the community again steps up to help our troops."

Cell Phones For Soldiers was founded in 2004 by teenagers **Robbie and Brittany Bergquist** at the ages of 12 and 13. The charity has since provided more than 300 million minutes of free talk time to servicemen and women stationed around the world through its calling card program, Minutes That Matter. Funds raised from the recycling of cellular phones are used to purchase prepaid international calling cards.

On average, Cell Phones For Soldiers distributes 1,500 calling cards each week to bases around the world, care package programs, deployment ceremonies and VA hospitals. Since 2004, the charity has provided U.S. troops with more than 400 million "Minutes That Matter" and distributed more than 5 million prepaid international calling cards and have recycled more than 25 million mobile devices, reducing the impact on landfills.

A donation of a mobile device to this community collection drive doesn't just help connect active military and veterans with loved ones, it also helps protect the environment by properly and safely recycling them so not to cause electronic waste, which can be extremely harmful to the environment if it ends up in a landfill. Electronics such as mobile devices do not last a lifetime, yet they are made with products that are non-disposable, such as cadmium, mercury, and lead as well as lithium batteries and rare-earth minerals, and commonly cased in plastic—all things that can cause damage to water supplies and ecosystems. Cell Phones For Soldiers works with a recycling partner which dismantles the device securely, identifying which components may be resold for reuse - which helps cut the demand for mining in vulnerable locations, and providing funding for the organization to help service members communicate with home and support veterans in need.

“We are so grateful to Sen. Griffo and his constituents for their ongoing support of our mission to connect America's bravest,” **said Rob Bergquist, founder and president of Cell Phones For Soldiers.** “We now have the capacity to put donated mobile devices—collected through events like Sen. Griffo's drive—in the hands of low-income and at-risk veterans. These devices will be lifelines to help veterans in need connect with critical resources.”

For more information on Cell Phones For Soldiers, please visit

www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com.

******To prepare your mobile phone for donation here are some tips on how to erase all personal information that may be stored on it to protect your privacy:***

Remove your phone's SIM card Erase your address book, photos, messages and other stored information.

Restore the device factory settings on your device.

For instructions on how to do this, go to the owner's manual or to the manufacturers' web site.

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