Senate Passes Griffo Bill To Help Utica-Watertown Region

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ALBANY – The New York State Senate passed a bill (S.3468) Monday that would provide an additional $573,794 in funds to the Utica/Watertown region for job training in the health care industry.

The legislation requires that each of the eight regions statewide receive a minimum of 2.5 percent of the total Health Workforce Retraining Initiative. The program supports the training or retraining of health industry workers for new jobs or to meet new job requirements.

The Utica/Watertown region is due to receive a measly 0.36 percent of the $26.8 million to be awarded this year, or $96,526. For comparison, the Rochester region – which has a similar number of residents and a similar number of health care workers to Utica/Watertown – is due to receive 5.9 percent of the available funding, or $1.58 million.

"Health care is one of the fastest growing industries in the United States and the landscape is changing rapidly," said Griffo. "There's a true need for a skilled workforce, especially in our rural hospitals. But there's also a newfound emphasis on inpatient and tertiary care models that are not 'one sized fits all.' For too long, the formula used to dole out grants shortchanged the Utica/Watertown region. This is an attempt to correct that oversight."

In a 2012 letter, the state Department of Health said it was willing to revisit the way it allocated grant funds and acknowledged that "historically, the Utica/Watertown region has been underfunded relative to the health care workers in the region."

In addition to assisting the Utica/Watertown region, the bill also provides new flexibility for grant recipients who are implementing the same project in several regions. It will allow those groups to transfer project funds among those regions, which would increase the number of people who could be trained.

A companion bill in the Assembly (A.4610) is in the Ways and Means Committee.