



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John E. Brooks

Brooks Applauds Passage of Volunteer Firefighter Cancer Coverage Bill

SEN. JOHN BROOKS June 20, 2017

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS, CANCER COVERAGE**



Senator John Brooks, a 48-year veteran of the volunteer fire service and former Fire Chief, today applauded the passage of the New York State Volunteer Firefighter Gap Coverage Disability Benefits Act (S1411A). Senator Brooks, a cosponsor of the bill, spoke from the Senate floor to voice his continued support for disability benefits for volunteer firefighters who acquire cancer from firefighting.

“This bill will help cover volunteer firefighters for serious risks that exist solely because of their service,” said Brooks. “Our first responders answer the call 24/7 and we all depend upon them to protect our lives and our property. When these men and women become sick helping their communities, we must do the right thing for them.”

Volunteer firefighters are contracting cancer at an alarming rate, due to toxic carcinogens burning in the fires they fight, according to a [series](#) of [studies](#) over the past few years.

Volunteer firefighters save New York State billions of dollars through their service, but the provisions for volunteer firefighters who contract a serious form of cancer are severely inadequate. In many instances, volunteer firefighters are forced to incur large out-of-pocket expenses while seeking treatment for cancer, a disease they got because of their service protecting their community.

Jerry Owenburg, an Ex-Chief with the West Babylon Volunteer Fire Department, praised the bill, saying, "I've been proud to be a volunteer firefighter for 40 years, even through the many times it took me away from spending time with my family. Fighting cancer as a result of firefighting shouldn't also be a financial burden on my family. Thank you, Senator Brooks, for supporting legislation that provides some relief to volunteer firefighters facing cancer."

Under the current firefighters' benefit law, a totally disabled firefighter is limited to \$600 per month in disability benefits. This legislation would create a gap coverage disability benefit to help the volunteers offset some of these expenses due to their illness and hopefully provide some peace of mind to the firefighters and their families.

“The men and women in the volunteer fire service are there for us in our worst moments. It's time we repay them by doing the same.”

You can find Senator Brooks' floor remarks [here](#).

