



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo, Brindisi gather with volunteer firefighters for ceremony celebrating Governor Cuomo's signature of the New York State Volunteer Firefighter Gap Coverage Cancer Disabilities Benefits Act

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO November 6, 2017

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



State Sen. Joseph Griffo (R-Rome) and state Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi (D-Utica) gathered with volunteer firefighters and other elected officials recently for a special ceremony highlighting Gov. Andrew Cuomo signing the New York State Volunteer Firefighter Gap Coverage Cancer Disabilities Benefits Act.

Both Griffo, who sponsored the legislation in the Senate, and Brindisi, a co-sponsor of the bill in the Assembly, fought for the passage of the law, which extends the existing Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law to cover all instances of melanoma, as well as cancer of the lung, prostate, breast, lymphatic, hematological, digestive, urinary, and reproductive systems. The bill also had several co-sponsors in the Senate and Assembly.

Unlike full-time career firefighters, volunteer firefighters across the state do not currently receive benefit coverage if they are diagnosed with cancer, despite the fact that much of the toxic fire and smoke they are exposed to on a regular basis are known to cause many of the cancers with which these volunteers are later diagnosed.

Effective Jan. 1, 2019, volunteer firefighters who contract certain cancers will receive access to tax-free disability and death benefits. Volunteer firefighters will be automatically eligible for the health benefits if:

- Upon entry to volunteer, a physical exam did not show any evidence of the cancers covered by this bill.
- Individuals have at least five years of service fighting fire in the interior of buildings.
- The firefighter is currently active or within 5 years of his or her last active date.

Sen. Griffo said, "Our volunteer firefighters work hard to make sure the communities they serve are safe and protected. We owe it to them to make sure they are protected as well, especially when it comes to being diagnosed with cancer as a result of the toxins, carcinogens and other chemicals they come into contact with while fighting fires. We have fought hard for the passage of this bill and there are many deserving praise for their efforts in helping to see this law passed, including the Firemen's Association of the State of New York; the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs; former Whitesboro Fire Chief Brian McQueen; and the many volunteer firefighters and departments across the state. We now can make sure that our courageous volunteer firefighters get the protection they deserve."

Assemblyman Brindisi said, "The signing of this legislation is very significant for all volunteer firefighters, their family members, and their fire departments. This new law will provide the

coverage these first responders deserve as they work day in and day out to protect our communities. Throughout my efforts to work toward fair and adequate protection for firefighters for service-related illnesses, I have heard their stories of surviving cancer without the coverage for it they deserve. Signing this bill into law finally rights that wrong. Throughout this campaign for fair insurance coverage for our volunteers, many have leant their voice. I'd like to thank all the firefighters who helped carry the message, as well as members of FASNY and the State Association of Fire Chiefs. The tireless advocacy of Brian McQueen, who shared his own experiences battling cancer, was absolutely a major reason this was a successful effort."

Sen. David Valesky (D-Oneida) and a cosponsor of the bill in the Senate said, "Firefighters face a higher risk of cancer because of exposure to carcinogens and other toxins while doing their job to protect their communities. After a diagnosis, they shouldn't have to worry about how to pay for large, out-of-pocket expenses during treatment because of gaps in health insurance coverage. I thank Gov. Cuomo for signing this bill into law to help firefighters who develop cancer as a result of providing a crucial community service."

Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush (R,C,I-Black River) and a cosponsor of the bill in the Assembly said, "I commend the governor for signing legislation that expanded the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law. This legislation was a crucial step forward in protecting the brave men and women who volunteer their time and safety to protect their communities. With the signing of this legislation, the governor has now eased the hearts and minds of thousands of volunteers across the state who now know the dangerous and life-threatening services they provide to the state just became a bit safer for themselves and their families. I am proud to be part of a legislature that recognizes the significance of our volunteer fire-fighters, and is committed to help them in sickness as well as health."

Assemblyman Marc Butler (R,C,I,Ref-Newport) and a cosponsor of the bill in the Assembly said, "It's an honor to support legislation to help our many amazing volunteer firefighters to provide cancer disability benefits. These men and women bravely go into dangerous situations, exposing themselves to carcinogenic materials on the behalf of saving New Yorkers in our communities. This is one way we can be there for them as they have been there for us countless times."

Assemblyman William Magee (D-Nelson) and a cosponsor of the bill in the Assembly said, “Firefighters encounter dangerous situations that can expose them to unknown, unseen toxins putting them at risk of increased cancer diagnosis rates. We owe it to them to provide presumptive cancer coverage should the need arise and I am grateful that this important legislation has finally become law.”

Assemblyman Brian Miller (R,I-New Hartford) and a cosponsor of the bill in the Assembly said, “Our local volunteer firefighters rush toward danger to save homes and lives,” said Assemblyman Brian Miller (R,I-New Hartford). “The recent measure signed into law provides the insurance coverage they deserve and some peace of mind for them and their families. We fought very hard for this bill to become law, and I would like to thank Brian McQueen for leading the charge along with all others involved in making this happen. Volunteer firefighters statewide deserve our protection and our thanks.”

Brian McQueen, former Whitesboro Fire Chief and a founder of the Believe 271 Foundation, said, “I applaud Governor Cuomo, Senator Griffo, Assemblywoman Gunther and Assemblyman Brindisi, along with all of the state and local elected officials who stepped up to the plate and supported this much-needed cancer bill for our volunteers. As we all know, firefighters are 102 percent more likely of obtaining occupational cancer than the general public providing quality service to our residents. This law will provide the necessary support for our volunteers and their families.”

Firemen’s Association of the State of New York President Ken Pienkowski said, “State Senator Griffo and Assemblymember Brindisi are loyal friends of the volunteer fire service. They have both been dedicated supporters and are a few of our most valuable allies — we are most grateful for the work they have done on our behalf. Thanks to the both of them, presumptive cancer coverage is now a reality, and we are eager to work with them on future bills and issues.”

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