



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## A Helping Hand for New York's Heroes

PATTY RITCHIE November 9, 2017



Every single day here in New York State, more than 96,000 of our family members, friends and neighbors put their lives on the line when they step up to keep our communities safe as members of volunteer fire departments.

Because they sacrifice so much to protect us, we need to show support for their service and find ways that we can keep them safe. To help in that effort, I recently cosponsored a bill that delivers health care benefits to volunteer firefighters who have been diagnosed with certain cancers developed in response to a fire emergency. Just recently, this bill was signed

into law.

Currently, volunteer firefighters are eligible for accidental disability and death benefits through Workers' Compensation only if they are injured in the line of duty. Thanks to this new legislation, effective January 1, 2019, our volunteer firefighters will also be eligible for health benefits to support treatment for life-threatening cancers.

Under the new law, volunteer firefighters who contract certain cancers will receive access to tax-free disability and death benefits. Specifically, volunteer firefighters diagnosed with lung, prostate, breast, lymphatic, hematological, digestive, urinary, neurological, reproductive systems, or melanoma cancer will be automatically eligible for 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; and
- The firefighter is currently active or within 5 years of his or her last active date.

It is fitting that volunteers who sacrifice their time, safety, and health to protect their communities now have essential assistance available in their time of need. With this measure, we will provide these courageous New Yorkers the protections and the peace of mind they deserve.