



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew Gounardes

## 9/11 Heroes Bills Sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes Signed into Law

ANDREW GOUNARDES September 11, 2019

| ISSUE: **9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS**



Brooklyn, NY– Four 9/11 Heroes Bills sponsored by Senator Gounardes were signed into law on September 11, 2019. The bills make it easier for first responders and their families to access the services they're owed.

The Unlimited Sick Leave Bill codifies unlimited sick leave for NYC workers and ensures that it cannot be negotiated on a piecemeal basis. The Five-Year Lookback bill provides retired

NYC firefighters diagnosed with cancer within five years of retirement presumption that the cancer was incurred in the performance of duties so they can access Accidental Disability Retirement pensions, a presumption NYS Firefighters already have. The NYCERS bill addresses delays in WTC-related disability claims by increasing the number of medical boards and physicians employed on NYCERS medical boards. The Accidental Death Benefit bill extends the period of time for family members to file for Accidental Death Benefits as a result of a qualifying World Trade Center condition.

In the years since 9/11, at least 10,000 first responders and people around the World Trade Center have been diagnosed with cancer, and at least 2,000 have died. The toll for emergency responders from 9/11-related diseases continues to rise.

The Unlimited Sick Leave Bill and NYCERS bill were sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblywoman Stacey Pheffer Amato. The Five-Year Lookback Bill was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblywoman Karines Reyes. The Accidental Death Benefit Bill was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblyman Peter Abbate, Jr.

“With the passage of these bills, we are helping to ensure that our 9/11 first responders get the benefits they deserve and are owed. For many first responders who ran into the rubble on 9/11, the ramifications continue to this day. Today, we are saying that we will be there for 9/11 first responders in their hour of need as they were there for us,” said State Senator Andrew Gounardes.

“There are no words to describe what these laws will do for our heroes and their families. The sense of loss and pain we feel each September 11th is unimaginable. The individuals who returned in the aftermath to help in the cleanup efforts exposed themselves to dangerous chemicals and toxins that have lasting effects. Effects that now, 18 years later, are killing many of the personnel who risked their lives, some of whom are not covered by unlimited

sick leave. This law ensures that ALL public employees have the rightful access to unlimited sick leave, closing the gaps in services,” Assemblywoman Stacey Pheffer Amato (D-South Queens) said. “Moreover, the reforms to the NYCERS Medical Review Boards will better serve New Yorkers with 9/11 related illnesses. This law is a common-sense measure that will have an enormous impact. By requiring additional availability of physicians and more flexible parameters in appointing a panel, it speeds the entire process of scheduling appointments, and overall processing of applicants. It was a pleasure working with Senator Gounardes who worked tirelessly to get these bills passed in the Senate. Thank you to all the first responders, unions, and advocacy groups for their tireless advocacy, especially Governor Cuomo for signing this bill into law- without your help this would not have been possible.”

“Our first responders are real life superheroes, however they are not invincible. Some are just being diagnosed with cancer related to their occupation, even in retirement. This is why the cancer five-year lookback bill is so important. I thank the Governor for signing this bill into law today. New York is giving our firefighters and fire officers the ability to continue accessing healthcare when they need it the most,” said Assemblywoman Karines Reyes.

"I went to Washington to demand that our government fully fund the Victims Compensation Fund. We won that fight. Now we are making real progress in our City and State on how we support our first responders who ran willingly into disaster on 9/11. Eighteen years later, we finally have guaranteed unlimited sick leave and easier access to disability benefits for 9/11 first responders, though it never should have taken so long. Today I thank those who advocated tirelessly on behalf of their fellow first responders as well as the elected officials who sponsored this legislation,” John Feal, Founder of the FealGood Foundation and 9/11 First Responder.

“The legislation being signed today will greatly aid many of the brave men and women first responders that answered the call on 9/11 and the years after. S.5246/A.7716 grants FDNY

retirees who are stricken with cancer within five years of retirement the presumption that the cancer was a result of their performance of duties. We commend Gov. Cuomo for signing these bills into law and thank Sen. Gounardes, Assemblywoman Pheffer-Amato, Assembly Member Reyes and Assembly Committee on Governmental Employees Chairman Peter Abbate for their fight on these issues this legislative session,” said Sam Fresina, President of NYS Professional Firefighters Association.

“On behalf of the entire membership of the FDNY Local 2507 Uniformed Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians and Fire Inspectors I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude and thanks to Senator Gounardes and his staff for their amazing work and support in the passage of these bills. I also would like to extend our gratitude and enormous appreciation to Governor Cuomo, a champion for Every 9/11 WTC Responder for signing into law these bills which will positively affect thousands of first responders,” said Gary Smiley, FDNY Local 2507 Uniformed Paramedics, EMT's & Inspectors WTC & Retiree's Liaison; FDNY Rescue Paramedic- Special Operations Command (retired due to 9/11 illness).

“Thank you Senator Gounardes, Assemblywoman Pheffer Amato, Assemblyman Abbate and Assemblywoman Reyes for moving through the State Legislature this package of bills that will help injured and ill 9/11 responders,” said Benjamin Chevat, Executive Director, 911 Health Watch.