



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Helping to Guarantee Health Benefits for Volunteer Firefighters with New Bills

PETE HARCKHAM April 6, 2022

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Albany, NY – The New York State Senate unanimously passed two bills from State Senator Pete Harckham that will help expand health benefits for volunteer firefighters. The legislation, when approved by the Assembly and enacted by the governor, will make permanent the long-standing law covering disability determinations for volunteer firefighters due to disease or malfunction of the heart or coronary arteries in one bill ([S.2972](#)), and certain lung disabilities in the other bill ([S.2973](#)).

“Volunteer firefighters statewide often incur major diseases and ailments in the course of protecting our residents and businesses, so we must reciprocate and safeguard the health of these brave first responders

whenever possible,” said Harckham. “These bills eliminate sunset clauses for heart and lung care while also streamlining access to these much deserved health benefits.”

In 1977, the State Legislature found that volunteer firefighters too often suffered injuries or deaths resulting from heart attacks suffered in the line of duty. The Legislature also found that claims of injuries from heart attacks were subjected often to lengthy delays. As a result, state lawmakers established specific procedures to expedite the handling of such claims—but called on the law to be renewed, so to speak, every two years. Harckham’s first bill makes permanent the provisions relating to disability due to heart disease, which expired in June 2020.

Forty-five years later, it is time to make this section of law permanent, Harckham noted.

“Our volunteer firefighters provide an invaluable service to New York State and our individual communities,” the legislation reads. “Accordingly, it simply makes sense to prevent unnecessary worry on the part of volunteer firefighters and their families as to whether or not they will receive their benefits.”

Harckham’s bill regarding firefighters with lung maladies will amend a 2006 law similarly to the heart bill.

In the line of duty, firefighters are exposed to gases, toxins and other substances that have damaging short- and long-term effects on the respiratory system. Firefighters experience risks for lung disease at significantly higher rates compared to the average adult population because of contact with numerous harmful chemicals from combustions. Again, Harckham’s bill simply eliminates a sunset clause and makes permanent a trusted and successful safety net for all volunteer firefighters.

“We are grateful for Senator Harckham’s leadership in getting this important legislation passed in the Senate,” said John Farrell, president of Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY). “Cardiac events remain the number one killer of firefighters annually across the country and lung issues are also a challenge many firefighters face. Making these vital benefits permanent is very important to the over 80,000 volunteer firefighters in New York State.”

RELATED LEGISLATION

2021-S2972

-
- Introduced

 - ◦ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

 - ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

 - ◦ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

 - Delivered to Governor

 - Signed By Governor

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Makes provisions permanent relating to disability due to disease or malfunction of the heart or coronary arteries

January 26, 2021

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by **Pete Harckham**

Do you support this bill?