



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew Gounardes

## Sen. Gounardes' Bills to Support Firefighters are Signed into Law

ANDREW GOUNARDES December 16, 2024

| ISSUE: **FIRST RESPONDERS, FIREFIGHTERS, FDNY, CIVIL SERVICE AND PENSIONS, ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE**



The three pieces of legislation expand disability benefits, strengthen insurance coverage and create pension parity.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*New York State Senator Andrew Gounardes issued the following statement today after Governor Kathy Hochul signed three bills he sponsored into law:*

“Firefighters are first responders that play a literal life-and-death role in keeping New Yorkers safe. These bills ensure we make the same commitment to firefighters that they make to all of us. By expanding disability benefits to cover thyroid cancer, we ensure firefighters who are exposed to dangerous chemicals in burning fires receive the care they deserve. By expanding insurance coverage to spouses of fire protection inspectors, we treat FDNY members with the dignity they deserve by offering their families equal health care coverage. And by creating pension parity amongst first responders, we create professional pathways for New Yorkers to pursue the most rewarding possible career in public service.”

***Background:***

The three bills signed by Governor Hochul include:

- **S9205**: This law includes thyroid cancer in the list of cancers presumed to be incurred in the performance of duty for disability retirement, ensuring firefighters exposed to cancerous chemicals in burning fires are protected under the law. In recent years, the rate of thyroid cancer in firefighters has increased. While thyroid cancer is covered under the World Trade Center 9/11 Cancer Bill, and firefighters in New York City are already granted a presumption that thyroid cancer is work-related, this law ensures every firefighter throughout New York State receives such coverage.
- **S8649**: This law extends lifetime COBRA coverage to the surviving spouses of fire protection inspectors. Chapter 706, signed in 2023, closed a gap related to COBRA coverage, which provides health care benefits to the families of employees after the employee loses their job. In New York City, the spouses of corrections and sanitation employees were eligible for lifetime COBRA coverage, regardless of whether the employee had retired at the time of their death. The spouses of FDNY employees, however, were only eligible for lifetime COBRA if the employee had retired on the date of their death. Otherwise, the spouse was eligible for COBRA for only 36 months. This law closes a further gap in

coverage by including fire protection inspectors in addition to other uniformed titles such as firefighter and EMT. It treats all FDNY uniformed members with the same level of dignity and respect by ensuring all surviving spouses are afforded equal levels of health care coverage.

- **S7128B**: In 2019, the legislature passed Chapter 431 to allow Tier 3 police officers in New York City to purchase time served in the NYPD Cadet Corps for purposes of tier reinstatement. This was done to rectify a long-standing inequity for NYPD members who had served in the Cadet Corps prior to 2012 and were wrongfully denied the opportunity to join NYCERS. Many of these officers then wound up in a later tier, Tier 3, with a reduced retirement benefit when Governor David Paterson vetoed the Tier 2 extender in 2009. With the passage of Ch. 431, these officers could repurchase their cadet service to reinstate to Tier 2 if they had joined the cadets prior to this veto. The skills garnered in the cadet program also apply to other uniformed careers, so many former cadets go on to join the FDNY instead of the NYPD. Tier 3 firefighters were never granted the opportunity to tier-reinstate, however, despite being in the same cadet classes that were wrongfully told they could not join a public retirement system. This law creates parity between the two professions so both have the opportunity to tier-reinstate to their initial dates of public service.

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## 2023-S7128B

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- 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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Relates to allowing certain members of the New York city fire department pension fund to receive a membership date in such fund attributable to service in the title of police cadet program

May 18, 2023

Signed by Governor

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