



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Griffo urges better benefit coverage for volunteer firefighters diagnosed with cancer

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO October 8, 2015

| ISSUE: [FIREFIGHTERS](#), [HEALTH CARE](#), [HEALTH](#), [INSURANCE](#)



**WHITESBORO** – State Senator Joseph Griffo and State Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi say it's time to provide better benefit coverage to volunteer firefighters, who face significant risk of developing cancer due to their duties.

Standing outside the Whitesboro Fire Department on Thursday, Griffo and Brindisi joined members of the volunteer fire service in urging the State Legislature to pass bills they both

co-sponsored that would amend the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law to include more forms of cancer with known links to fighting fires.

Representatives of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York and the Believe 271 Foundation – established in 2014 to provide financial and emotional support to volunteer firefighters diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses in Oneida and Herkimer counties – also stood with Griffo and Brindisi to explain why these expanded protections are necessary.

The State Senate passed this bill ([S3891](#)) in the spring with Griffo as a prime co-sponsor, but the companion bill supported by Brindisi ([A5518](#)) was never voted on in the State Assembly this past session.

**This time, Griffo and Brindisi are urging the public to get involved and create momentum for this proposed legislation by signing petitions in support of these expanded protections. The petitions will be available online for people to sign at the following sites:**

**Sen. Griffo's website:** <http://www.nysenate.gov/petitions/joseph-griffo/protecting-our-volunteer-firefighters-cancer>

**Assemblyman Brindisi's website:** <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Anthony-Brindisi>

**State Senator Joseph Griffo, R-Rome:** “When our volunteer firefighters put their lives on the line every time they battle a blaze, they do whatever it takes to ensure that our lives are safe and our homes aren't destroyed. At that moment of crisis, the last things in their mind are the painful consequences that their service might bring upon them years down the road, with unforeseen illness and unexpected medical bills. For all that these volunteers do for us, I believe we have an obligation to do whatever we can to help these courageous and selfless men and women at a time when they need us most.”

**State Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi, D-Utica:** “When firefighters are frequently exposed to smoke and fumes, the risk of contracting any of a variety of cancers is significantly

increased. I have heard the compelling stories of volunteer firefighters who are cancer survivors. No one who volunteers to help keep our communities safe should be denied coverage for medical conditions that clearly were the result of their service fighting fires. I will continue to sponsor and advocate for this much needed expansion of benefits for volunteer firefighters.”

Under this proposed legislation, after a volunteer firefighter has entered the fire service upon successfully passing a physical examination that did not reveal any evidence of cancer, it will be **presumed** that any cancerous conditions that develop later are the result of that firefighter performing their duties.

This expanded coverage would include cancer of the digestive, hematological, lymphatic, urinary, prostate, neurological, breast and reproductive systems. According to research studies, firefighters are at greater risk than the general population to be diagnosed with various cancers, including: 102 percent more likely to develop testicular cancer, 62 percent more likely to develop esophageal cancer, 53 percent more likely to develop multiple myeloma of the blood, 26 percent more likely to develop breast cancer and 21 percent more likely to develop intestinal cancer.

**Ex-Whitesboro Fire Chief and cancer survivor Brian McQueen, also one of the founders of Believe 271 and a member of the FASNY Board of Directors:** “I know firsthand just how devastating the words ‘you have cancer’ are. While my cancer is thankfully in remission, I must still make regular trips to my oncologist, not knowing if the disease has returned. Presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters is an absolute must, as no firefighter should have to face cancer alone. Thank you to State Senator Joseph Griffo, as well as bill sponsor State Senator Michael Nozzolio, for their leadership on this issue. And with State Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi’s support, the New York State Assembly must do the right thing, and pass this bill.”

**Ken Pienkowski, First Vice President of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York:**

“Presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters is a top priority for FASNY. Firefighters are being diagnosed with cancer at much higher rates than the general public, due largely to the carcinogens and toxins they are exposed to in the line of duty. The State Senate passed legislation that would provide our volunteer firefighters with a safety net in the event of a cancer diagnosis, thanks in large part to the efforts of State Senator Joseph Griffo and the bill's sponsor, State Senator Michael Nozzolio. FASNY also thanks State Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi for his support, and we urge the Assembly to pass this bill during the next session. We further urge all New Yorkers to sign a petition showing their support of this critical legislation. Please visit [www.fasny.com/fightcancer](http://www.fasny.com/fightcancer) to learn more about how you can help.”

**Floyd Fire Chief Dan Schwertfeger, cancer survivor and President of the New York State**

**Association of Fire Chiefs:** “We need to get this bill passed in New York State, so we can provide this help to all volunteer firefighters, not just career firefighters. It just seems like young and old firefighters alike are being diagnosed with cancer at an alarming rate in Oneida County and throughout the state, and firefighters are dying from this disease at a higher rate than the average person. Here in Oneida County, we're constantly hearing about somebody who's been diagnosed with cancer, going for treatment or passed away because of this. It doesn't matter if they've been in the fire service for 5 years or 15 years, this is something we need to do to help the people who are helping us.”

**Assistant Chief Brian Palmer of the Barneveld Fire Department, as well as Vice President and co-**

**founder of Believe 271:** “When a person who serves their community as a Volunteer Firefighter becomes ill from that service, whether it be cancer or some other illness, they should not be cast aside and forgotten about. These people put everything aside to respond and help those in need, even through the most difficult, heart-wrenching circumstances. They are our local heroes, and to simply ignore or choose not to help them in their time of

need would be a decision that would negatively affect not only the volunteer firefighters and their families, but the entire volunteer fire service as a whole. No one fights alone.”

Since Believe 271 was established, it has helped 21 firefighters – including 19 diagnosed with cancer – across Oneida and Herkimer counties, Palmer said. Based on the startling statistics detailing the cancer risks firefighters face, an educational program was developed across that state that has been attended by 244 fire departments and 1,878 members of the fire service.

As a result, Palmer said, all of those departments are beginning to adopt simple methods to help protect themselves and limit their exposure to toxic smoke, fumes and residual toxins that remain on their firefighting gear.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2015-S3891**

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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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Expands the coverage to include cancer of the digestive, hematological, lymphatic, urinary, prostate, neurological, breast and reproductive systems

February 20, 2015

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by **Michael F. Nozzolio**

Do you support this bill?