



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Faithful Servants To The Community, Volunteer Firefighters Get Recognition From The State Senate

CATHARINE YOUNG April 20, 2016

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ALBANY – Local volunteer firefighters are a tremendous resource for our community, not only saving lives but also helping hardworking taxpayers save billions of dollars that would otherwise add to the local property tax burden. But this service can sometimes come at a cost to their personal health.

Recently, **legislation** co-sponsored by Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- 57th District) to amend the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law to incorporate certain types of cancers into existing medical coverage, passed the State Senate. The bill recognizes that overexposure to smoke and toxic fumes increase the risk of firefighters' contracting certain types of cancers, including cancers of the digestive, hematological, lymphatic, urinary, prostate, neurological, breast and reproductive systems.

"Volunteer firefighters set aside personal health and safety to assist those in need, never wavering from their duties. Volunteers fight the same fires as paid firefighters and they take the same risks, so it is only right that they are provided with the same insurance coverage. Since a greater number of firefighters are being diagnosed with cancer, and medical studies continue to conclude that firefighters are at a significantly higher risk for many types of cancer, this legislation will provide them the medical coverage they need to address health

issues that may result from their selfless service,” Senator Young said.

If enacted, the bill would provide presumptive cancer coverage to an estimated 100,000 volunteer firefighters, by expanding eligibility for certain types of temporary and permanent disability benefits. Under current law, volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers are eligible for certain weekly cash benefits and medical care if their injury or illness occurs in the line of duty. The new bill adds to the existing list of types of cancers that could result from service as a volunteer first responder.

With area departments also facing a critical shortage of members, many volunteer firefighters are finding themselves increasingly stretched thin to answer the alarm of a neighbor in need. In recognition of the important role the departments play in keeping the community safe, Senator Young secured \$250,000 in the state budget to help the Firemen's Association of the State of New York's (FASNY) fulfill its mission of recruiting new volunteer firefighters.

“It takes a special dedication, a strong desire to help others, and a love for community to forgo precious time with family and friends to respond to the signal that someone is in distress, but the senses of pride that comes with helping someone in need can be tremendous. Area departments are always looking for new members, and the RecruitNY program provides residents the opportunity to learn what it takes to be a volunteer first responder and the benefits volunteering holds,” said Senator Young.

“FASNY does a great job assisting area departments with outreach, helping coordinate open-houses and highlighting the good deeds done by volunteer firefighters. I strongly encourage anyone who is interested in giving back their community to explore the opportunities available in their local department. Your service and action can have an enormous positive impact and you will join the ranks of our tremendous local heroes,” Senator Young said.

According to a report released earlier this year by FASNY, New Yorkers save more than \$3.8 billion each year due to the services provided by the state's volunteer fire departments. FASNY's study also concluded that if the state switched to an all-paid fire service, an additional 30,822 firefighters would need to be hired and more than 1,300 stations would have to be built new or reconstructed; it would cost about \$5.95 billion to acquire the necessary structures, vehicles and equipment; and property taxes across the state could rise by about 26.5 percent on average to cover the added cost.

This year's RecruitNY weekend is April 23 and 24. To find area departments participating, visit <http://www.recruitny.org/participation-area/>.