



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara signs on to legislation to ensure volunteer firefighters eligible for critical health care benefits

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 13, 2017

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**



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Elmira, N.Y., January 13—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) said today that he is continuing to co-sponsor legislation this year to extend critical health care benefits to volunteer firefighters by ensuring expanded levels of protection for firefighters stricken with cancer attributable to their service as volunteers.

“Our volunteer firefighters make great sacrifices to protect the health, safety and well-being of lives and property throughout our communities. They deserve and they’ve earned the health care coverage this legislation would provide,” said O’Mara. “It’s the least we can do for our volunteer firefighters and their families.”

The legislation (**S1411/A711**) has received Senate approval for the past two legislative sessions but has not come to a vote in the Assembly. If enacted into law, it would expand the Volunteer Firefighters’ Benefit Law to provide presumptive cancer coverage to New York’s more than 100,000 volunteer firefighters.

Increasing numbers of firefighters are being diagnosed with cancer and recent medical studies have concluded that they are at a significantly higher risk for many types of cancers than the general population because of the high levels of carcinogens and other toxins they’re exposed to in burning buildings and the other hazardous environments that firefighters routinely encounter.

The legislation is the top priority for the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York (FASNY) in 2017.

FASNY President Ken Pienkowski said, “Presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters is unquestionably FASNY’s number-one priority for the 2017 legislative session. Thirty-five other states in the nation, most recently Ohio, have passed presumptive cancer legislation. Fully 89 percent of New York’s municipalities are protected by volunteer firefighters, who save the state approximately \$3 to \$4 billion each year, which is what it would cost to maintain an all-paid fire service.”