



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Griffo's bill extending cancer benefits for volunteer firefighters passes Senate

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO January 24, 2017

| ISSUE: **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS, CANCER, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HEALTH INSURANCE**



ALBANY – The New York State Senate on Tuesday once again passed Senator Joseph Griffo's legislation that would expand medical coverage for volunteer firefighters who are diagnosed with various forms of cancer linked to their duties.

Unlike full-time career firefighters, volunteer firefighters across the state do not currently receive benefit coverage if they are diagnosed with cancer, despite the fact that much of the

toxic fire and smoke they are exposed to on a regular basis are known to cause many of the cancers these volunteers are later diagnosed with. Senator Griffo's proposed legislation, if signed into law, would extend the existing Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law (VFBL) to cover all instances of melanoma, as well as cancer of the digestive, hematological, lymphatic, urinary, prostate, neurological, breast and reproductive systems.

The most important provision of Senator Griffo's legislation ([S1411](#)): 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 of the covered cancerous conditions that develop later are the result of that firefighter performing their duties.

As Senator Griffo has continued to push for this legislation year after year on behalf of volunteer firefighters, this is the third year in a row the Senate has passed this bill and the earliest it has been approved by the Senate in any legislative year. **But the Assembly has failed to take action on this bill each year, and both Senator Griffo and representatives of the volunteer fire service are urging the Assembly and the Governor to finally pass this legislation.**

**Senator Joseph Griffo, R-Rome, said:** "It is heartbreaking to see our volunteer firefighters and their families experience so much suffering while coping with cancer, after all they sacrificed to protect our homes and lives from devastating fires. These selfless men and women in our communities volunteer for the fire service for all the right reasons because they want to keep us safe, without ever imagining the painful price they may pay years later after being exposed to such toxic substances. I am proud to have pushed for this legislation in the Senate on behalf of all our volunteer firefighters, and I hope that the Assembly and Governor will finally join us in providing these volunteers with the support and protections they deserve."

**Former Whitesboro Fire Chief Brian McQueen** is a cancer survivor and one of the founders of 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.

On Tuesday, McQueen and the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY) thanked Senator Griffo for his determination and continued advocacy until these cancer benefits become law.

"Cancer in the fire service is a life-altering challenge that volunteer and career firefighters face on a daily basis. I applaud Senator Griffo for fighting for this legislation, and the entire Senate for once again passing this major bill, and I urge the Assembly and Governor to join us in standing up for all firefighters," **McQueen said.** "Progression of fires due to the synthetic materials in homes, as well as the fire retardant materials that burn off the carcinogens that are absorbed in our bodies, can cause cancer in firefighters. Studies have shown that firefighters are twice more likely to get cancer than the general public."

**McQueen continued,** "As an occupational cancer survivor from my volunteer firefighting work, my family and I know quite well that I didn't volunteer to get cancer. I volunteer to give back to my great community of Whitesboro and our neighboring towns and villages. While this bill will not help firefighters like me, it will provide assurance and protection to our newer firefighters and their families with better awareness of the prevalence of cancer in the job we do."

**Ken Pienkowski, President of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), said:** "New York's volunteer firefighters didn't volunteer to get cancer. FASNY thanks the State Senate and Senator Griffo for quickly passing this bill to start 2017. Thirty-five other states in the nation have already passed presumptive cancer legislation. New York's paid firefighters

already have this important coverage, but volunteers do not. The Assembly must act quickly to ensure the health and well-being of New York's volunteer fire service and pass this bill. We call upon Local Governments Chairman William Magnarelli to send this bill to the floor for the vote it deserves.”

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2017-S1411**

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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 the New York state volunteer firefighter gap coverage cancer disability benefits act

January 09, 2017

Signed by Governor

Sponsored by **Joseph A. Griffo**

Do you support this bill?