



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew Gounardes

## Gounardes/Abbate Bill to Ensure Public Employees who Died of Covid-19 Receive Line-of-Duty Death Benefits Passes Legislature

ANDREW GOUNARDES June 2, 2020

| ISSUE: **CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC; COVID-19, ESSENTIAL WORKERS, PUBLIC EMPLOYEES, ACCIDENTAL DEATH BENEFITS**

**Brooklyn, NY** - A bill by State Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assemblymember Peter Abbate, Jr. to ensure that family members of public employees who died of COVID-19 receive full line-of-duty death benefits was passed this evening by the State Senate and State Assembly. The legislation, [S.8427/A10528](#), would guarantee that any public employee who contracted covid-19 during the pandemic will be eligible for their accidental death benefits to be paid out yearly to their beneficiaries.

Currently, public employees who die of Covid-19 are eligible for ordinary death benefits, the benefits they would receive if their deaths were not the result of an accident on the job. This legislation ensures that public servants who die of coronavirus throughout the height of this pandemic would receive the more substantial death benefits resulting from an in-service accident.

“It is fitting that we plan to pass this legislation just after Memorial Day, as we honored those who have given their lives for their country. Those essential workers we lost to covid-19 gave their lives in a different kind of war - a war against a vicious virus. These families have suffered a horrific loss and should not have to wait in limbo to get the benefits they are

owed,” said **State Senator Andrew Gounardes**.

"I'm thankful that the Senate and Assembly were able to work together on such an important issue and take this positive step forward for the working men and women of New York State," said **Assemblyman Peter Abbate, Jr.**

Senator Gounardes, Chair of the Senate's Civil Service Committee, and Assemblyman Abbate, Chair of the Assembly's Governmental Employees Committee, have been working on this legislation when it became clear that dedicated public servants were falling in the line of duty as they provided essential services and support for New York residents.

“Since the earliest days of the Coronavirus reaching America, FDNY EMS Local 2507 members have been the first point of contact for hundreds-of thousands of New Yorkers requiring emergency medical care. The inclusion of death benefit protections for our workforce, for our nurses, other first responders and their families is imperative. From the women and men on the front lines, thank you for recognizing our sacrifices,” said **Oren Barzilay, President of FDNY EMS Local 2507**.

“The members of Local 420 have always risen to the challenges of ensuring the health and wellbeing of all New Yorkers, no matter where they live, where they have come from or their ability to pay for healthcare. This pandemic has challenged that commitment to the point where members have lost their lives. Yet we have remained strong and never wavered from our commitment. While others remained sheltered in the safety of their homes, we proudly stood side- by-side with fellow health care professionals, first responders and other essential workers who were called upon to serve. We thank Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assemblyman Peter Abbate for drafting legislation that helps to take care of the families of the members that we have lost fighting this pandemic,” said **Carmen Charles, President of Local 420, Municipal Hospital Employees Union, DC 37**.

"While we cannot put a price on the appreciation and respect we have for our front-line heroes, this bill will help the families of those workers cope with the financial aftermath of such a devastating loss. We can never fully repay the debt we owe to our heroes, but this is one small step in providing the security their families deserve," said **Mario Cilento, president of the New York State AFL-CIO.**

"Since the first tragic death of a Detective due to the Coronavirus, the DEA has been fighting tirelessly to ensure these heroes and their families receive the line-of-duty death benefits they deserve," said Detectives Endowment Association President Paul DiGiacomo. "As we have said from the start of this pandemic there is no difference between responding to Ground Zero, being shot while on duty, or being taken down by the invisible bullet of COVID-19. The Governor and Mayor have heard the DEA's constant calls to fulfill their obligation to take care of our brave Detectives and other frontline workers, and we appreciate their public support for providing the death benefits these men and women have all certainly earned. Forever alongside the families of our fallen, the DEA now looks forward to seeing this legislation being passed in Albany," said **Paul DiGiacomo, President of the Detectives Endowment Association, Inc.**

"We applaud the Senator for his diligent work on behalf of New York City firefighters and first responders as they continue to take on and defeat COVID-19. This is a fantastic first step, but there remains more work to be done to make sure that those who have been injured or disabled from their battle against COVID-19 will be taken care of as well. I look forward to continuing to work alongside the Senator and the New York City delegation to ensure that each member of the uniformed services and their families are protected should they be stricken or killed by this illness," said **Gerard Fitzgerald, President, Uniformed Firefighters Association.**

"On behalf of the men and women of New York City's Boldest, I thank Assembly Member Peter Abbate and Senator Andrew Gounardes for working with our Legislative Chairman,

Freddy Fusco, to ensure Correction Officers are included in this important legislation, which would permit the families of our officers who died from COVID-19 related illnesses, to receive critical financial assistance. Thank you for supporting our frontline heroes,” said **COBA President Elias Husamudeen**.

"Public sector NYSNA nurses have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic," said **NYSNA Executive Director Pat Kane, RN**. "We support this legislation because nurses and other essential workers have sacrificed so much to care for New Yorkers through the COVID-19 pandemic, and we deserve to know that we and our loved ones will be taken care of."

“On behalf of the Executive Board and, more important, the hundreds of thousands of members of the New York State Public Employee Conference (NYSPEC), the only umbrella group comprising a broad spectrum of public employees from all across the great State of New York, I applaud the efforts of Senator Andrew Gounardes, Chair of the Civil Service & Pensions Committee, and his counterpart Assemblyman Peter Abbate, Chair of the Assembly’s Governmental Employees Committee. As sponsors of legislation specifically designed to recognize the front-line workers who have given their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have demonstrated their commitment to the survivors in recognizing the ultimate sacrifice of these selfless public employees by ensuring that a presumptive death benefit is provided. We urge immediate passage and enactment of this important measure to, at the very least, give some small comfort to the survivors,” said **Peter D. Meringolo, Chairman of the New York State Public Employee Conference**.

“I want to thank Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assemblymember Peter Abbate for taking up this cause and making sure that the educators and other public servants who have died in this pandemic are recognized and that their families are cared for,” said **Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers**.

"In the face of the most devastating health crisis in a century our courageous city work force, at great personal risk, stepped up to meet the challenge. Too many became sick. Too many others lost their lives. They never faltered. They did their job. Even as we mourn our losses we are grateful and fully support the State legislation to authorize line-of-duty death benefits for the families of City employees who die from Covid-19. It is the right thing to do. We thank Senator Andrew Gounardes , Assemblyman Peter Abbate and others behind this bill. We appreciate the support of Mayor de Blasio, and urge the legislature to act and for Gov. Cuomo to sign it in to law," said **Harry Nespoli, President of the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association, Local 831 I.B.T. and the Chair of the NYC Municipal Labor Committee.**

**PEF President Wayne Spence** said, "We applaud the sponsors of this bill for taking an important first step in delivering meaningful support to the families of the first responders who succumbed to the coronavirus while on the frontline protecting New York residents. These heroes went to work every day to deliver essential services to New Yorkers and we believe it is only right that New York state provide this critical baseline death benefits to their families."

**Mary Sullivan, President of the Civil Service Employees Association** said, "While many New Yorkers have been staying-at-home during this pandemic, CSEA members continue to show up to provide the services that New Yorkers rely on. Their commitment to the communities that they serve led to many being exposed to COVID-19, with some members tragically passing away. While nothing can ever take away the pain caused by the loss of a loved one, this legislation will help their family during this difficult time. I thank the Governor, Senate, and Assembly for recognizing and honoring the sacrifice that these employees have made."

"As essential workers, many brave CWA members who work for the City of New York as Traffic Enforcement Agents and Supervisors, Administrative Employees for Health & Hospitals and many other city agencies, and NYC Board of Election workers, have put their

lives on the line to keep the city moving throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The families of these heroes must be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve by ensuring that they are fully protected with line-of-duty benefits. I commend the legislature for their swift actions on this important matter," said **Dennis Trainor, Vice President, Communications Workers of America District 1.**

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### 2019-S8427

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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 establishing a coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public employee death benefit

May 28, 2020

Signed by Governor

Sponsored by **Andrew Gounardes**

Do you support this bill?