



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Griffo, AT&T & CNY Veterans Outreach Center kickoff annual Cell Phones For Soldiers Collection Drive

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO November 10, 2022

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In honor of Veterans Day and Military Family Appreciation Month, state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-I-C-Rome, was joined by AT&T and the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center today to kick off this year's Cell Phones For Soldiers collection drive. For every donated phone, mobile device or tablet valued at \$5, Cell Phones For Soldiers is able to provide 2.5 hours of free talk time to deployed troops via calling cards. All proceeds from the recycled devices will be used to buy long distance calling cards and other communication services for troops at home and abroad. As many as 200,000 troops are serving in the U.S. military around the world and by donating to Cell Phones For Soldiers, local residents and businesses can provide a valuable lifeline for America's

bravest men and women to connect with loved ones back home. The collection drive starts on Veterans Day (Nov. 11) and runs through Saturday, Dec. 11. The public and businesses can drop off gently used and unwanted cell phones and/or tablets at collection bins in AT&T stores throughout the region and at several public locations throughout the senator's district. Drop-off locations include:

- Jervis Public Library: 613 N. Washington St., Rome
- Adirondack Bank Center, 400 Oriskany St. W., Utica
- Central New York Veterans Outreach Center, 726 Washington St., Utica
- Utica Public Library: 303 Genesee St., Utica
- Chanatry's Hometown Market: 485 French Road, Utica
- Utica State Office Building: 207 Genesee St., Utica
- Turning Stone Resort Casino: 5218 Patrick Road, Verona
- New Hartford Public Library: 2 Library Lane, New Hartford
- Lloyds of Lowville: 7405 S. State St., Lowville
- AT&T Stores • 4777 Commercial Drive, New Hartford
- 1319 Erie Boulevard W., Rome
- 224 N. Genesee St., Utica
- 220 Genesee St., Oneida

This is the sixth year that the drive has taken place lead by Senator Griffo and AT&T. Residents throughout Sen. Griffo's district have donated approximately 5,801 devices and have provided troops with more than 500,000 minutes (more than 8,300 hours) of free calls. "The holidays can be a difficult time for members of our military because they are often so far away from their families," Sen. Griffo said. "The simple sound of a loved one's voice can go a long way to lift their spirits. These brave men and women have stepped up to serve our nation, and I am proud to be teaming up with AT&T, the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center, Cell Phones for Soldiers and local businesses and organizations to help connect these troops to their families back home." "As a company that connects the world, AT&T believes that one of the best ways to support and thank the brave men and women that protect and serve our country, and the veterans before them, is by helping to keep them connected with their family, friends and loved ones," said Greeley Ford, Senior Network Engineer, AT&T. "We are extremely honored to collaborate with Senator Griffo and Cell Phones For Soldiers again this year to encourage this kindhearted and generous community to join us in supporting veterans, active military personnel and their families by donating their used mobile phones, tablets and other wireless devices." "We are so grateful to AT&T, Senator Griffo, and his constituents for their ongoing support of our mission to connect America's bravest," said Rob Bergquist, founder and president of Cell Phones For Soldiers. "As we approach our 19th year of helping military service members and veterans, we continue to serve those who served our country and look forward to expanding our mission. We now have the capacity to put donated mobile devices—collected through events like Senator Griffo's and AT&T's drive—in the hands of low-income and at-risk veterans. These devices will be lifelines to

help veterans in need connect with critical resources.” "The holiday season can be a difficult and trying time for many families, especially for those who have a loved one serving in the military and away from home," said Vincent Scalise, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center executive director. "I thank Sen. Griffo for again spearheading this collection drive and for his continued support of our armed forces and their families." Cell Phones For Soldiers was founded in 2004 by teenagers Robbie and Brittany Bergquist at the ages of 12 and 13. The charity has since provided more than 300 million minutes of free talk time to servicemen and women stationed around the world through its calling card program, Minutes That Matter. Funds raised from the recycling of cellular phones are used to purchase prepaid international calling cards. On average, Cell Phones For Soldiers distributes 1,500 calling cards each week to bases around the world, care package programs, deployment ceremonies and VA hospitals. Since 2004, the charity has provided U.S. troops with more than 400 million “Minutes That Matter” and distributed more than 5 million prepaid international calling cards and have recycled more than 25 million mobile devices, reducing the impact on landfills. A donation of a mobile device to this community collection drive doesn’t just help connect active military and veterans with loved ones, it also helps protect the environment by properly and safely recycling them so not to cause electronic waste, which can be extremely harmful to the environment if it ends up in a landfill. Electronics such as mobile devices do not last a lifetime, yet they are made with products that are non-disposable, such as cadmium, mercury, and lead as well as lithium batteries and rare-earth minerals, and commonly cased in plastic—all things that can cause damage to water supplies and ecosystems. Cell Phones For Soldiers works with a recycling partner which dismantles the device securely, identifying which components may be resold for reuse - which helps cut the demand for mining in vulnerable locations, and providing funding for the organization to help service members communicate with home and support veterans in need. For more information on Cell Phones For Soldiers, please visit [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com). \*\*\*To prepare your mobile phone for donation here are some tips on how to erase all personal information that may be stored on it to protect your privacy:

- Remove your phone's SIM card
- Erase your address book, photos, messages and other stored information.
- Restore the device factory settings on your device.
- For instructions on how to do this, go to owner's manual or to the manufacturers' web site.

For more than a century, AT&T has proudly supported active military personnel, their families and veterans, including helping veterans and active military transition into the workforce. AT&T recognizes how valuable veterans’ leadership, critical thinking, and diverse perspectives can be, and the company has invested in

programs focused on the transition from military service to a civilian corporate setting, with more than 12,000 active employees self-identifying as a veteran as of June 2021. Since 2007, AT&T and its customers have donated more than \$65 million and distributed more than 800,000 pre-paid calling cards to servicemen and women and Military Friendly magazine has recognized AT&T as a top 10 brand in 2022. AT&T's continued support of active military, veterans and their families closely align with the company's commitment to FirstNet®, Built with AT&T, America's safety communications platform providing first responders with a reliable, highly secure, interoperable, and innovative wireless communications and broadband network dedicated to public safety. For more information on Cell Phones for Soldiers, please visit [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com). # # #