
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 410

AN ACT CONCERNING FIREFIGHTER CANCER.

SUMMARY

This bill extends certain benefits to survivors of firefighters who (1) die of certain cancers and (2) would be eligible for benefits from the firefighters cancer relief account (see BACKGROUND). Specifically, it:

1. extends Fallen Hero Fund benefits to these firefighters' surviving families or beneficiaries,
2. allows certain surviving family members who were covered under the firefighter's health care benefit plan at the time of their death to apply for or keep the coverage for a specified period of time, and
3. requires these benefits to be funded by the firefighters cancer relief account.

The bill also requires, by October 1, 2026, the State Fire Marshal to establish a one-year pilot program to reimburse firefighters in two municipalities who get screenings for cancers common to firefighters.

Lastly, the bill makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

FALLEN HERO FUND BENEFITS

By law, the Fallen Hero Fund pays \$100,000, within available appropriations, to the surviving families of first responders (emergency medical technicians, paid firefighters, paramedics, and police officers) killed in the line of duty or who sustained injuries that were the direct or proximate cause of the first responder's death.

The bill extends this same benefit to the surviving families of

firefighters who:

1. were diagnosed with, and died from, any cancer affecting the skin or brain or the skeletal, digestive, endocrine, respiratory, lymphatic, reproductive, urinary, or hematological systems, and
2. would be entitled to benefits from the firefighters cancer relief account on or after October 1, 2023.

As under existing law for first responders killed in the line of duty, the “surviving family” is a surviving spouse, surviving child (whether dependent or not), or surviving parent of the firefighter, or the most recently listed surviving beneficiary on file with the employer.

Under the bill, payments to these surviving families must be made from the firefighters cancer relief account, rather than the Fallen Hero Fund as existing law requires for payments to surviving families of other first responders.

By law, the comptroller must annually report to the Public Safety and Security Committee on the expenditures made from the Fallen Hero Fund for the prior year, the fund’s current balance, and information on additional amounts needed for the fund. The bill expands this reporting requirement to also include the same information for the firefighters cancer relief account.

PARTNERSHIP PLAN COVERAGE

By law, non-state public employers that provided coverage under a “partnership plan” (health benefit plans the comptroller offers to these and other employers) to a first responder who is killed in the line of duty must continue to provide the coverage to the survivors who were covered under the plan at the time of the first responder’s death. The bill requires these employers to provide this same coverage to survivors of firefighters who died of cancer, as described above. As under existing law, the coverage must continue for one year after the death and may be renewed annually for up to five years. The non-state public employer must facilitate the coverage continuation and renewal.

As under existing law for first responders, under the bill, a nonstate public employer that did not provide coverage under a partnership plan to the firefighter who died of cancer must apply for coverage under a partnership plan for, and at the request of, the survivors who were receiving health care benefit coverage through a plan offered to the firefighter at the time of the death. The comptroller must accept the application on the terms and conditions applicable to the partnership plan for enrollment and coverage of the survivors for one year and the enrollment and coverage may be renewed annually for up to five years. The non-state public employer must help with the initiation and renewal of the enrollment and coverage.

By law, and under the bill, anyone receiving this coverage is exempt from paying monthly premiums for these plans and the comptroller must reimburse any employer making these premium payments. Under the bill, reimbursements due to a firefighter cancer death are paid from the firefighters cancer relief account, rather than the Fallen Hero Fund, as existing law requires for survivors of other first responders.

CANCER SCREENING PILOT PROGRAM

By October 1, 2026, the State Fire Marshal must establish a one-year pilot program to reimburse paid firefighters in two municipalities who get cancer screenings for cancers that are common to firefighters. "Firefighter" refers to any (1) local or deputy fire marshal, fire investigator, fire inspector, and other classes of inspectors and investigators for whom the State Fire Marshal and the Codes and Standards Committee have jointly adopted minimum qualification standards, and (2) uniformed member of a paid municipal, state, or volunteer fire department.

The State Fire Marshal must consult with a nonprofit with expertise in the field of cancer screening to determine which screenings qualify for the pilot program's reimbursement. The pilot program must be operated in one municipality served by a volunteer fire department and one municipality served by a paid fire department.

Starting July 1, 2026, the State Fire Marshal must accept applications

from municipalities for participation in the pilot program on a form she prescribes. By January 1, 2028, the State Fire Marshal must submit a report to the Public Safety and Security Committee on the program's results, including any recommendations for continuing or expanding it.

BACKGROUND

Firefighters Cancer Relief Account

By law, the firefighters cancer relief account generally provides, for eligible paid firefighters diagnosed with certain cancers and die or become disabled because of it, (1) workers compensation benefits, (2) retirement and survivor benefits, and (3) certain disability benefits available from the Connecticut State Firefighters Association. To be eligible, the firefighter must be diagnosed with certain cancers, and (1) have shown no sign of cancer at a medical evaluation after entering into service, (2) not have smoked cigarettes for 15-years prior to the cancer diagnosis, (3) been employed for at least five years in certain firefighting positions, and (4) have submitted to annual medical screenings as recommended by their medical provider.

Beginning January 1, 2027, the account will be funded by a five cent per month fee, per service line, on each subscriber to a telephone service provider (including cell phone and Internet phone service providers, but not for certain prepaid cell phone services).

Related Bills

sHB 5460, §§ 10 & 11, favorably reported by the Public Safety and Security Committee, (1) requires the state comptroller to establish and maintain a new unit to coordinate and spread information on public benefits available to firefighters, including fallen hero fund claims, and (2) correspondingly shifts, from the state treasurer to the state comptroller, responsibility for reimbursing employers for survivors health insurance benefits from the firefighters cancer relief account.

sHB 5003, §§ 11 & 12 favorably reported by the Labor and Public Employees Committee, (1) expands partnership plan coverage to survivors of unpaid volunteer firefighters killed in the line of duty and (2) state employee insurance coverage to the survivors of unpaid

volunteer firefighters and certain state marshals killed in the line of duty.

sHB 5403, favorably reported by the Public Safety and Security Committee, (1) expands partnership plan coverage to survivors of unpaid volunteer firefighters killed in the line of duty and (2) requires nonstate public employers to apply for partnership plan coverage for survivors of first responders or unpaid volunteer firefighters even if they were not employees of the non-state public employer at the time of their death.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 29 Nay 0 (03/17/2026)