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Palm Beach County First in Florida to Approve Cancer Presumption Language for Firefighters

On February 5, Palm Beach County Commissioner Melissa McKinlay, along with her fellow County Commissioners, approved a new collective bargaining agreement with the Professional Firefighters/Paramedics of Palm Beach County, Local 2928, IAFF, Inc. Included in this agreement is cancer presumption language that entitles firefighters to on-the-job disability and supplemental long term disability benefits if they are diagnosed with cancer during the performance of their regular duties.

Palm Beach County is the first county in Florida to approve cancer presumption language for firefighters. With the Florida Legislature consistently failing to pass similar legislation in recent years, Commissioner McKinlay pushed to include this language so Palm Beach County could lead by example.

“Firefighters perform one of the most important, yet dangerous, jobs in our society. I’m thankful that Palm Beach County is taking the lead in Florida by recognizing the risks of carcinogenic exposure that these brave men and women face during their careers,” Commissioner McKinlay said. “Firefighters spend their careers putting their lives on the line for us, so Palm Beach County’s approval of this contract sends a strong message that we will stand with them when they need it most. I hope it encourages the Legislature to finally pass essential legislation to protect firefighters across the state.”

A growing body of research and data shows how cancer impacts the firefighting profession. According to the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), cancer is the leading cause of death among firefighters. From January 1, 2002 to March 31, 2017, the IAFF reports that 61% of career firefighter line-of-duty deaths were caused by cancer. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health shows that firefighters in the United States face a 9% higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer, and a 14% higher risk of dying from cancer, than the general population.

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