

DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATION INSPIRED BY RECENT DEATH OF CINNAMINSON FIREFIGHTER GAINS PANEL APPROVAL

**Measure Would Ensure Health Coverage for Family
Members of Deceased First Responders**

(TRENTON) – Legislation sponsored by Assembly Democrats Troy Singleton, John Wisniewski, Herb Conaway, Marlene Caride and Annette Quijano to help ensure medical coverage is not canceled abruptly for family members of deceased first responders was advanced by an Assembly panel on Thursday, March 19, 2015. The measure was inspired by the recent death of a Cinnaminson firefighter.

"Most of us go to work every day and never worry about whether we'll return home safely," said Singleton (D-Burlington). "For family members of first responders, this is a persistent fear every day. This is the least we can do to help honor the sacrifices their loved ones make day in and day out. Whether Lt. Hunter's death was a direct result of his official duties is immaterial given the constant sacrifices he made throughout his career."

Cinnaminson Fire Lt. Chris Hunter was found unresponsive at his home in mid-November, just hours after his last shift ended. The cause of death was attributed to a cardiac event. However, because it was ruled that he did not die in the line of duty, his family was not eligible for a continuation of medical coverage under his plan.

The bill ([A4062](#)) is designed to ensure a six-month continuation of family medical coverage for the spouse and dependents of a deceased police officer, firefighter or emergency medical technician who dies within 24 hours of going off duty. Under current law, the employee's family medical coverage terminates upon death because the employment was terminated.

The families of public safety officers who die in the line of duty are covered for medical insurance by other provisions of law. In order to ensure that the surviving spouse and dependents are not charged an excessive premium for the six-month medical coverage extension, the bill requires the employer to negotiate an extended coverage provision with the medical insurance carrier.

"Firefighters and all others who willingly put themselves into dangerous situations sacrifice their personal health and wellbeing for the sake of their communities. That can often put a significant strain on their loved ones as well," said Wisniewski (D-Middlesex), New Jersey Fire Safety Commission chair. "This legislation is about providing the families of emergency responders with some peace of mind."

"The men and women who protect New Jersey residents daily should never have to worry about whether their families would be secure in their absence," said Conaway (D-

Burlington). "This measure will help ensure that family members in mourning can focus their attention on remembering their loved one, not navigating health insurance."

"Our public safety officers devote themselves to the safety of others," said Caride (D-Bergen / Passaic). "This bill will provide peace of mind to them and to their loved ones by eliminating the fear of a sudden cancellation of medical coverage. This is a well-deserved safety net for the families of those who serve our state."

"The cause of death – regardless of whether it's on- or off-duty – shouldn't overshadow a lifetime of self-sacrifice when it comes to New Jersey's public safety officers," said Quijano (D-Union). "This measure honors the courage of our state's most noble men and women by helping to ensure the wellness of their dependents."

The bill was advanced by the Assembly Labor Committee.