SECTION 1. Title 23 of the General Laws entitled "Health and Safety" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

CHAPTER 12.8

THE FIREFIGHTER CANCER WELLNESS ACT

23-12.8-1. Short title. – This chapter shall be known and may be cited as "The Firefighter Cancer Wellness Act."

23-12.8-2. Legislative findings. – It is found and declared as follows:

(1) According to 2001-2002 statistics from the National Cancer Institute, Rhode Island has the nation's highest incidence rate of bladder cancer found in any state, with twenty-eight and eight-tenths (28.8) cases per one hundred thousand (100,000) residents as compared with a nationwide annual incidence rate of twenty and nine-tenths (20.9) per one hundred thousand (100,000) residents.

(2) Studies have shown that incidents of bladder cancer among firefighters occur at a significantly higher rate than that of the general population due to their exposure to toxic chemicals.

(3) Bladder cancer is one of the most deadly cancers, if not detected. If diagnosed in its early stages, bladder cancer has a five (5) year survival rate over ninety percent (90%). If diagnosed at an advanced stage, the five (5) year survival rate is less than ten percent (10%).

(4) Previously, bladder cancer screening required expensive and invasive testing.
Modern technology now allows for simple, inexpensive and noninvasive screening. It now costs far more to treat one victim of advanced stage bladder cancer than to screen thousands of firefighters.

(5) The state of Rhode Island must take action to promote firefighter wellness and to ensure the health and safety of its firefighters from a disease which can be treated, if detected early.

23-12.8-3. Program established. – (a) The director of the department of health shall establish, promote and maintain a public information program regarding the incidence of bladder cancer in professional and volunteer firefighters in Rhode Island in order to encourage such persons to seek medical care for the prevention or treatment of any malignant conditions resulting from occupational exposure to hazardous materials. Firefighter participation in this wellness program shall be voluntary.

(b) This wellness program shall be conducted throughout the state and shall include, but not be limited to:

(1) Preemployment testing, annual testing and other follow-up testing as may be recommended by the department;

(2) Data collection of all incidences of bladder cancer in firefighters and related professions in Rhode Island; and

(3) A program of education for such groups.

(c) The wellness program shall emphasize the need for annual testing and the need to remain informed about additional developments concerning links between firefighters' occupational exposure to hazardous materials and bladder cancer.

(d) The director shall designate and may enter into contracts with providers of health care and/or bladder cancer testing materials for the purpose of establishing screening programs for firefighters and related professions. In selecting provider(s), the director shall consider such provider's compliance with state and federal standards, the provider's location in relation to geographical distribution of firefighters, and the capacity of such provider to properly screen for bladder cancer using the most accurate and economically efficient means available.

(e) The department shall, on or before January 31st of each year, submit a report to the general assembly of its findings and recommendations concerning the effectiveness, impact and benefits derived from the program.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.
This act would create a program directed by the department of health to test for, collect data on, and to educate firefighters in awareness of bladder cancer. This act would take effect upon passage.