



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER
General President

THOMAS H. MILLER
General Secretary-Treasurer

Statement of Harold A. Schaitberger, General President, International Association of Fire Fighters

Regarding H.R. 1786, James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Reauthorization Act

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The memory of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that claimed so many lives in New York, at the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, will never fully vanish. Of the nearly 3000 individuals who died on that day, 343 were New York City fire fighters. In the ensuing days, weeks and months, scores of their brother and sister fire fighters toiled at Ground Zero to search for survivors, and later, to recover those who were lost.

What these heroes, men and women who wanted nothing more than to help America recover from a national tragedy, didn't realize was that Ground Zero had become a toxic and hazardous environment, putting the health and lives of responders and local workers and residents at risk. They were exposed to a dangerous cocktail of dust and chemicals, including carcinogens such as benzene, asbestos and dioxins. The mixture was inhaled, ingested and absorbed. Underground fires and rubble removal operations allowed elevated air contamination to persist for months. The sad result was that more than 30,000 responders and survivors developed injury and illness - injury and illness that is directly attributable to their work at, and proximity to, Ground Zero.

To ensure responders and survivors received adequate care, in 2010 Congress passed the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, establishing the World Trade Center Health Program to provide medical monitoring and treatment for 9/11-related health conditions. Because these illnesses also caused major financial strains on responders and survivors, many of whom are no longer able to work, the bill also reopened the September 11 Victim Compensation fund to provide compensation for economic damages and losses due to illness or injury.

By nearly all accounts, the programs have been wildly successful. According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 70,000 responders and survivors have registered with the World Trade Center Health Program. Additionally, over 21,000 individuals availed themselves of treatment through the Program in the past year, including over 1800 persons living outside of the New York City area.

Diseases detected and treated through the World Trade Center Health Program include aerodigestive disorders such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma, certain musculoskeletal disorders and a multitude of cancers. The program also treats responders and survivors for mental health disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder.

Fire fighters and other first responders have been particularly affected. Nearly 900 members of the New York City Fire Department and more than 550 New York Police Department personnel are currently struggling with severe 9/11-related illnesses, not including the more than 100 fire fighters and 80 police officers who have already died from such illnesses.

Despite the clear need for the programs established by the Zadroga Act, they will expire without Congressional action. The World Trade Center Health Program will expire in October 2015, and the Victim Compensation Fund will close in October 2016. This, even though many of the 9/11 illnesses are persistent and life-long. This, even though 9/11 illnesses are still being diagnosed in many. Cancer, in particular, continues to develop in responders and survivors due to its long latency period. To date, medical research has identified more than 60 types of cancer caused by the 9/11 toxins. Nearly 4000 individuals have been diagnosed with cancers caused by or worsened by the aftermath of the attacks, a number which will surely continue to rise.

Furthermore, the long-term health consequences in responders and survivors are unknown. Their exposure was sustained and unprecedented in medical history. We have no way of knowing what the health impact will be ten years from now. Regular monitoring will help ensure that latent diseases and worsening conditions are detected and treated early, allowing for better health outcomes.

If we fail to reauthorize the Zadroga Act, responders and survivors will no longer have access to expert monitoring and treatment. If we fail to reauthorize the Zadroga Act, responders and survivors with newly diagnosed or worsening illnesses will be left uncompensated for their injuries.

That is why we must, today, move to advance H.R. 1786, the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Reauthorization Act. The act would permanently extend the World Trade Center Health Program and the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund so that the heroes of 9/11 will continue to receive monitoring, treatment, and compensation without interruption.

The act, sponsored by Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Peter King (R-NY), and Jerry Nadler (D-NY) has, to date, gained 82 bipartisan cosponsors from every corner of this nation. Members of this House recognize that this legislation is by no means a regional concern. Responders came from all over the country to aid in the response to the attacks, and some local responders from New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania have since moved. 9/11 responders and survivors today reside in every state, and 431 of 435 Congressional districts.

Unlike the original law, H.R. 1786 would make the World Trade Center Health Program and the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund permanent. The survivors of 9/11 should not have to worry every few years that their health care might vanish. They should not have to worry about how they would support their families were they to become ill. They should not have to worry about partisan politics in Washington D.C. when their lives and livelihoods are on the line.

Passing the original Zadroga Act took seven long years. We cannot and must not allow years to pass before we reauthorize this critical law. Those who responded on 9/11 and in the following months selflessly put their lives and health on the line to help America recover from a national tragedy. It is our patriotic duty and our moral obligation to continue providing them the care they need and deserve.

