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Officials demand permanent funding for 9/11 victims compensation to stem 'escalating crisis'

Without permanent funding, more than 90,000 9/11 first responders and survivors across the country will be left without financial assistance, according to officials.



Rep. Carolyn Maloney, center, City Councilwoman Margaret Chin, left, and Councilman I. Daneek Miller, right, rally in lower Manhattan in support of a federal bill that would permanently authorize the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Act. Photo Credit: Rush Perez

By Lauren Cook

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Politicians and advocates rallied in lower Manhattan Wednesday in support of a federal bill that would permanently authorize the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Act.

The rally, organized by City Council members I. Daneek Miller and Margaret Chin, was held across from the National September 11 Memorial and Museum a day before the 17-year anniversary of the end to recovery operations at Ground Zero.

“With more individuals coming forward with related illnesses, we cannot turn our backs on these survivors,” said Chin, who represents lower Manhattan. “With the funding for this critical program set to expire next year, it is incumbent upon elected representatives to ensure our country delivers on this promise.”

Sponsored by U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, the Never Forget the Heroes Act would guarantee money for the Victim Compensation Fund through 2090. It also would make several amendments to the fund, including an extension of claim submissions to October 2089 and reimbursements to claimants whose payments were slashed due to insufficient funding.

In February, officials running the fund had warned they were running dangerously low on cash and that payments to those suffering from illnesses would be drastically cut. The fund was last authorized in 2015, but since then almost \$5 billion of the allotted \$7.375 billion has already been doled out to more than 21,000

people suffering from cancers and other illnesses linked to the toxic rubble at Ground Zero, officials had said in February.

Without permanent funding, more than 90,000 9/11 first responders and survivors across the country will be left without financial assistance, according to officials. Since 9/11, more than 2,000 FDNY members and nearly 1,000 NYPD personnel have retired due to illnesses linked to the toxic air at Ground Zero. Hundreds more FDNY and NYPD members have died.

City Councilman I. Daneek Miller speaks during Wednesday's rally across from the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in lower Manhattan. Photo Credit: Rush Perez

“The notion that the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund could one day cease to exist is unimaginable,” said Miller, chair of the

City Council Civil Service and Labor Committee. “The escalating crisis of sick and injured seeking help through the VCF to address their health needs have grown beyond the program’s capacity and must be resolved quickly and definitively.”

Maloney, who also attended the rally, said the number of people to die of 9/11-related illnesses could soon eclipse the 2,997 lives lost on the day of the attacks.

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“We vowed to never forget the first responders, survivors, and families who risked their lives and made incredible sacrifices for our country,” she said. “While we made health care permanent, the

compensation fund is running out of funds. We need to make sure these heroes never have to go without the support they need.”

Established in 2001, the Victim Compensation Fund first gave more than \$7 billion to the families of those killed in the 9/11 terror attacks as well as thousands of survivors who were injured. The fund closed in 2004 but was reopened in 2011 with the signing of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act.

The Never Forget the Heroes Act will likely to be brought up in the House Judiciary Committee next month and is expected to be approved by the House of Representatives. It will then go through a hearing and be put to a vote in the Senate.

Miller and Chin introduced a resolution in the City Council Wednesday calling on Congress to pass the legislation.



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