

Testimony of Rep. Peter T. King
Judiciary Committee
June 11, 2019

The Need to Reauthorize the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund

Thank you Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Collins for holding today's hearing on the need to reauthorize the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. It is a pleasure to appear today with Congresswoman Maloney and before Chairman Nadler, both of whom I have worked closely on this critical issue. I would also like to thank Ranking Member Collins for his support of this bill, as well as the more than 300 Members of the House—from both parties—who are cosponsors of this legislation.

The September 11th Victim Compensation Fund (VCF) was created in the aftermath of the horrific attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, PA. Congress has since reopened and reauthorized it to provide for sick and injured first responders, survivors, and the families of those who have died from illnesses due to exposure to toxins during the rescue, recovery and cleanup operations at the crash sites.

This program has been a lifeline for my constituents, and for first responders and survivors in nearly every Congressional district. To date, the VCF has received over 48,000 eligibility claims from all fifty states and has made over 28,000 determinations since being reopened. The program has strong bipartisan backing and has been run effectively by the Bush, Obama and Trump Administrations. The application process is extremely rigorous and carefully monitored to prevent fraud.

H.R. 847, the *Never Forget the Heroes Act*, would achieve two critical objectives in support of the September 11th VCF: extend it to 2090, which would effectively make it permanent, and backfill awards that have been reduced due to insufficient funding.

Each day, more and more first responders and survivors are getting sick and dying from their 9/11-related diseases, like cancer, respiratory illnesses and other chronic conditions. We already know from the 9/11 health programs that these illnesses have long latency periods and can decades to manifest. If the VCF is not extended past 2020, these men and women will lose the ability to seek compensation for these deadly conditions.

While Congress has previously extended this program for five years at a time, we must now make the VCF permanent and fully fund it. Cops, firefighters, recovery workers and survivors need to know that this program will provide for them and their families if and when they get sick. Again, cancers and chronic conditions linked to 9/11 toxins can take years to show up. They need certainty.

As it stands, the VCF has been forced to implement drastic cuts to awards due to insufficient funding. When the Fund was last reauthorized, it was based on the best available data. However, due to a surge in cancer claims and deaths, current funding is inadequate. Claimants are having their awards slashed by 50-70% before offsets are even deducted. Since the cuts were announced in February, 835 awards have already been reduced. This is a devastating blow to the 9/11 community. Congress should immediately pass H.R. 847 to reverse these cuts and make claimants whole.

Very soon, more people will have died from 9/11-related illnesses than were murdered on that day. The number of local, state and federal law enforcement officers who have died of 9/11 illnesses is already more than double that of those who died on September 11th. We must fulfill our promise to them to “never forget.”

Once again, I thank Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Collins for holding today's hearing. I look forward to working with you both to pass H.R. 847.