

Good morning. My name is Lea Geronimo. I am a resident of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I also work in an office three blocks away from the World Trade Center. The September 11th disaster changed my life forever. I am here to today to share my story, as of one of the forgotten victims of that tragic day.

The toxic World Trade Center dust permeated my office as well as my neighborhood, but as a result of repeated assurances by the government stating the air was ok, I had no other choice but to go back to work less than a week after the disaster. At work or at home, I could not escape the dust and the fumes.

Within months of 9/11 I developed Bronchitis. What I thought was just a random occurrence is now a chronic problem. Since 9/11 I have had Bronchitis nine times. Nine months after 9/11 I developed constant heavy menstrual bleeding. This continued for five months. I was given a sonogram, but the doctors could not explain what was going on. Last year, I developed lesions and polyps in my uterus and cervix. I had them removed and to this day, my doctor is unsure why I developed these problems at such a young age.

Additionally, I started to get small psoriasis spots throughout my body. There were some on my elbow, on my scalp and on my back. Recently my thighs and scalp broke out into dozens of these painful spots, covering my skin. I have to use a combination of various prescription medicines every day. These include two different creams; one for my body and one for my face. I also use a special prescription shampoo and a scalp medication. Additionally I have been receiving UV light treatments three times a week to treat the dozens of spots I have all over my legs and torso.

These treatments and medicine regiment are not only taxing, but costly. To date, even with limited health insurance, I have paid more than \$5,000 out of pocket. To make matters worse, I've had to take a 10% pay cut at my job. I have also started to get deductions from my salary to pay towards my health insurance.

Today I face worsening health problems, skyrocketing medical expenses and shrinking healthcare. But my story is not unique, in fact it is increasingly the norm for countless families and low-income workers in the Lower East Side and Chinatown.

As a member of the Beyond Ground Zero Network a coalition of grassroots organizations, legal and healthcare advocacy groups we recognized the mounting health crisis brewing in our communities. Within weeks of 9/11 we began outreach and surveyed over 2,000 residents and workers who put their health as number one priority. We found thousands of residents and local workers suffering from new and worsened cases of asthma, severe breathing problems and intense coughing. Today whole families suffer from asthma, respiratory, skin and stomach problems.

Without any funding, we launched a collaborative 9-11 treatment program with Bellevue Hospital. This pilot program got off the ground with intense community participation by

Beyond Ground Zero and expanded one year ago. Today we have a backlog of over 700 residents and workers, representing the tip of the iceberg.

As the only 9-11 treatment program for residents and local workers in Lower Manhattan, our collaborative treatment program is only a small step towards addressing the mounting health crisis brewing on our local communities.

There is no excuse for taking small steps on this fifth anniversary of September 11th. Our health has been destroyed, we cannot get this back. Our lives will never be the same and we will not tolerate half-measures and the whisper of a promise. We demand action now, our lives depend upon it. Our communities demand reparations for the lies about the toxic air. We need compensation because we cannot work due to these health problems. Finally, we need a comprehensive long-term treatment and study program to provide immediate care and to continue investigating the complex and emerging 9-11 health problems.

Now is the time to act.

Thank you.