



November 16, 2007

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2331 RHOB  
Washington, DC 20515-3214

Dear Representative Maloney:

On behalf of the 1.4 million members of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), including thousands of workers who assisted in the 9/11 rescue and cleanup operations, I am writing to thank you for sponsoring the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, H.R. 3543.

As you well know, shortly after the attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) it became apparent that those who died or were injured in the collapse of the Twin Towers were not the only victims of the 9/11 attack. Since then, many others have become ill due to exposure to toxic air and other physical and mental health hazards. Among the victims who suffered the most intense exposure to these hazards were workers who were engaged in the extraordinary rescue, recovery and cleanup operations, and the restoration of utilities and other vital services at and around Ground Zero.

These workers, after putting their lives on the line during the rescue and clean up efforts, are sick and many of them can no longer work. Nearly 70 percent of responders examined by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine suffered respiratory problems, with one-third suffering significant loss of lung function. The Fire Department of New York (FDNY) found that rescue workers suffered an average loss of 12 years of lung capacity. Gastrointestinal problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health problems are also widespread. Despite these pervasive health problems, workers' compensations claims are being contested and many workers have lost their health insurance.

H.R. 3543 is a comprehensive response to the needs of these stricken workers, as well as residents, students and others in the affected area who have been harmed. The bill provides short and long term solutions to the health and income security needs of the Ground Zero workers and surrounding residents.

For the past several years, Congress has designated emergency funding for the WTC Worker and Volunteer Medical Screening Program and Centers of Excellence to screen and treat 9/11 victims, to develop uniform treatment protocols, and to collect and analyze data. The data confirms that the health impact on workers and residents is serious and will be long-term. It is urgent that Congress act soon to authorize these important programs to sustain and expand the scope of services for 9/11 victims and their families.

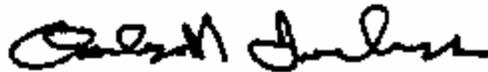
This bill wisely builds on the existing monitoring and treatment programs and ensures that 9/11 victims will have access to specialized health care services from physicians trained in occupational medicine and familiar with treating WTC-related illnesses. This is crucial as the illnesses that have stricken 9/11 workers are difficult to diagnose and treat. In addition, the bill addresses the critical need to monitor the health of these workers so that emerging illnesses are recognized quickly and protocols can be developed for diagnosis and treatment. Early treatment of new illnesses and complications are vital to improving the health outcomes of the workers.

H.R. 3543 also takes a sensible approach to compensating victims who can no longer work due to their 9/11-related illnesses. Workers who have become ill are suffering as a result of their patriotic service to the country. It is fair to ask the nation to shoulder the financial responsibility for a just compensation. Reopening the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund would provide an efficient process for compensating workers and their families.

The 9/11 attack was not only an attack on New York; it was an attack on the nation, and the heroic rescue effort included workers from all 50 states. Compelled by a moral obligation, the nation acted to compensate and care for the victims injured in 9/11 attacks as well as to compensate victims' families. The same moral obligation should compel the nation to help 9/11 rescue, recovery, and clean-up workers and area residents who have or will become ill because of their exposure to WTC hazards.

AFSCME looks forward to working with you to advance H.R. 3543 as it moves through the legislative process. Thank you for your leadership to help these workers.

Sincerely,



Charles M. Loveless  
Director of Legislation

CML:bl:tm

Cc: Anna Cielinski, Legislative Assistant