

July 28, 2010

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.6 million working and retired members of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), including thousands of workers who assisted in the 9/11 rescue and clean-up operations, I am writing to urge you to vote for the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act (H.R. 847) when the bill is considered by the House of Representatives. This bipartisan bill is a fiscally responsible, comprehensive response to the health and economic needs of sick workers, community members, students and others suffering from exposures resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

On September 11, 2001 and during the following days and weeks, tens of thousands of emergency workers, construction workers, and others rushed to the World Trade Center (WTC) to assist in rescue and recovery operations. These workers and residents, and others near Ground Zero, were exposed to a toxic mix of dust and fumes from the collapse of the WTC and the subsequent fires, some of which lingered for weeks. Now thousands of these individuals are suffering from serious respiratory diseases and other health problems.

The bill authorizes the World Trade Center Program for a 10 year period to provide health care for at least responders and residents with WTC-related health problems. Further, the bill re-opens the Victim's Compensation Fund as an alternative to the tort system and limits future liability for New York City and the contractors. The federal obligation is fully offset, capped at \$4.2 billion for the first 10 years, and includes contributions from the City of New York as well.

The legislation recognizes that it is essential that the health and monitoring programs in the legislation be funded through mandatory spending. A discretionary program subject to the fluctuations of the annual appropriation process, particularly discretionary freezes, would severely weaken the delivery of health care service required. H.R. 847 already controls costs by capping the number of responders and residents who could participate in the program as well as annual and 10-year spending caps totaling \$3.2 billion on health expenditures. It also requires Congress to review the program in 10 years to reauthorize it and continue these essential services. The most responsible way to fund this program is through mandatory spending that is paid for fully.

The 9/11 attack was not only an attack on New York; it was an attack on our nation, and the heroic rescue effort included workers from all 50 states. Had Congress known of the effects of the toxic exposures from the WTC collapse and clean-up, accommodations would have been made at that time to better protect responders, recovery workers and community members. It is now time for Congress to address the health needs of 9/11 responders and community members. AFSCME urges you to vote for H.R. 847. After nearly nine years, it is urgent that this bill move forward now.

Sincerely,



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Director of Legislation

CML:blb

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

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