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## **Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays September 8, 2004**

Three years after the cataclysmic attacks on the World Trade Center, shock waves still emanate from Ground Zero. Diverse and delayed health problems continue to emerge in those exposed to the contaminants and psychological stressors unleashed on September 11, 2001. An effective response to that attack, and future terrorist assaults, requires a coordinated, sustained program to monitor, diagnose, research and treat those wounds.

Last October, this Subcommittee convened in New York City to discuss the rigor and reach of federal, state and local efforts to assess the public health impacts of September 11<sup>th</sup>. We heard hopeful descriptions of outreach networks and monitoring protocols. We heard criticisms of slow funding and arbitrary deadlines. And we heard concerns about a patchwork of short-term solutions to an admittedly long-term set of needs.

Today we revisit those issues, asking what more has been learned about the health effects of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and what yet needs to be done to understand, and repair, the physical and mental toll of catastrophic terrorism.

It is a complex challenge. As we will hear in testimony from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), federal leadership and resources continue to

play a critical role in helping public health and disability compensation systems adapt to the demands of an urban battlefield.

Make no mistake, the firefighters, police, emergency medical personnel, transit workers, construction crews and other first responders did not just go to work on September 11<sup>th</sup>, they went to war. In the days and weeks that followed, those who labored and lived near Ground Zero fought to survive against a subtle, prolonged assault on their bodies and minds. Many are still fighting. For them, and for future casualties in this all too modern war, the national public health response has to be as vigilant and implacable as the enemy we face.

Our second panel of witnesses brings first-hand knowledge of the medical shadow still cast by the fallen towers of the World Trade Center. We appreciate their time and their insights, and we look forward to the testimony of all our witnesses.