

Written Testimony of Rep. Peter T. King (NY-03)

Subcommittee on Health of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Hearing entitled "H.R. 6594, the *James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2008*"

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2332 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Deal, and members of the Subcommittee on Health, thank you for inviting me to speak on this important issue. I would like to thank my colleagues, Mrs. Maloney, Mr. Nadler, and Mr. Fossella, for their hard work and dedication to the *James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act*, H.R. 6594, and am pleased to have the opportunity to explain why such legislation is so crucial.

On September 11th, 2001, the nation sustained the greatest attack on our homeland in history. I am sure that everyone in this room remembers the exact moment they found out about this tragedy and where they were as they watched the towers finally succumb and collapse. In New York City, as the towers burned and civilians were evacuating the buildings, brave men and women were rushing into the World Trade Center. These men and women, the members of the FDNY, NYPD, Port Authority, and other emergency services, gave their lives to save others. Moreover, in the weeks and months following the attack, after having already lost so many friends and colleagues, these same people worked diligently in the cleanup and recovery effort. Their work was an inspiration not only to me and my fellow New Yorkers, but to the nation as a whole. I am proud to say that over 1,200 of my constituents are among those that responded to the 9/11 attacks.

However, the devastation of 9/11 did not end once the cleanup was complete. Those that responded are now becoming ill due to the dust, debris, and toxins they were exposed to on 9/11 and during the recovery effort. These individuals sustained not only serious physical harm, but also extreme emotional and mental trauma as a result of their work.

As you heard from my colleagues, Congress has appropriated some funds for an ongoing medical monitoring and treatment program for 9/11 first responders. This program has resulted in a number of medical studies showing the detrimental effects that exposure to toxins at Ground Zero have had on first responders, volunteers, and area residents and workers. It is a scientific fact that those who worked in the recovery efforts have decreased pulmonary function, have developed adult onset of lower and upper respiratory conditions, and have experienced worsened symptoms of asthma and other conditions.

With limited resources, the WTC Centers of Excellence in the New York metropolitan area have done an outstanding job of monitoring and caring for responders, but funding for this program should not be an annual battle. These men and women are very sick and they are so because they rose to the occasion and did the hard work that the federal government asked them to do. While I have been supportive of all current efforts, more must be done for the heroes of 9/11. We must come to the aid of those who selflessly responded to the 9/11 attacks by creating a permanent program of treatment and monitoring. The list of ailments currently being endured by those who had 9/11 exposures may only grow longer as the years since the attacks pass. We must ensure that these individuals receive adequate preventive care in the present, but we must also create an infrastructure and be prepared to care for these individuals in the future.

The program that would be established by H.R. 6594 would put in place a structure under which all those affected by 9/11, both responders and residents, can receive that healthcare. The cost of this program is a small price to pay given the sacrifice these courageous individuals have made.

Furthermore, it is not only New Yorkers that responded to the attacks. Every district in this country has at least one responder that answered the call of duty on 9/11. H.R. 6594 would establish a national treatment and monitoring program so that those responders who either came from out-of-state to help New York in our time of need or who have since moved can receive quality medical treatment for their 9/11-related illnesses even if they do not live in the New York metropolitan area. I am extremely grateful to those that traveled from Texas, Florida, California, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and across the country to help their fellow citizens in need. The national program established by H.R. 6594 would show that the federal government is also grateful for what these compassionate and patriotic individuals did.

The reality is that the FDNY, NYPD, and others who responded to the attack on New York were on the front lines of the first battle in the War on Terror. Just as they were there for us when our country was challenged, these heroes now need our help. The federal government has the responsibility to care for all those who responded to the attack on the World Trade Center, just as those who responded at the Pentagon have been protected by the federal government. The men and women in New York – without question, without protest – worked tirelessly for months on the burning pile; the least we can do is to ensure they are receiving medical treatment for the ailments they have as a result of this work. This is truly a national problem and Congress must act now to help the heroes of 9/11.