



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

March 10, 2008

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, H.R. 2764, signed by the President on December 27, 2007, for the first time made residents, office workers and other non-responders experiencing health effects from the September 11 terrorist attack and its aftermath eligible for federal assistance for medical evaluation, screening and treatment. These non-responders include the nearby residents, area workers, pedestrians and school children exposed to debris, dust, smoke and fumes resulting from the attacks. It has been more than six years since this attack on our country but, unlike first responders who have been eligible for medical care supported by NIOSH, these individuals have not received any federal assistance to deal with the health impacts of 9/11.

An estimated 400,000 people – only one-quarter of them rescue and recovery workers – were the most heavily exposed to the possible environmental hazards and trauma of the September 11 terrorist attack. These individuals – who together would form a city the size of Oakland, California – live in every state in the nation. For example, ten percent of the 2,200 people being treated through the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation's WTC Environmental Health Center (the Bellevue Center) are from 20 states outside of New York. Bellevue is receiving approximately 250 calls through its hotline (1-877-WTC-0107) every week, which results in an average of 30 new patients per week. These new patients, in addition to the 2,200 patients that Bellevue is currently serving, demonstrate an ongoing medical need for those non-responders.

The current federal fiscal year started on October 1, 2007, yet federal funds for the Bellevue Center have not been released – and some have indicated that funds may not be released during this entire fiscal year. Unlike the Centers of Excellence that treat first responders (the World Trade Center programs at the New York City Fire Department and Mt. Sinai Hospital), the Bellevue Center has not received any federal funding to date. Some in the Administration have suggested that further study is needed before funds are made available to this group. There is absolutely no need for such a delay. Published, peer-reviewed studies have already reported adverse respiratory and mental health effects in residents, evacuees and students. Further research and analysis is needed but it has been clearly established that there are many residents, office workers and children who need and deserve help now.

Because of the attacks of September 11 and their aftermath, many individuals are now experiencing seriously diminished health and some are unable to work. The World Trade Center Health Registry, which was started in 2002 and has tracked the health of 71,000 enrollees from across the country, has found that:

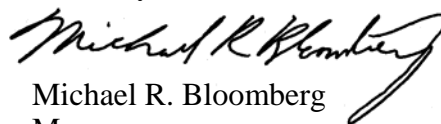
- Individuals from every age and income group have multiple symptoms, including “World Trade Center cough,” shortness of breath, chronic sinusitis, GERD (gastro esophageal reflux disease), depression and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).
- One in eight (13%) of the Lower Manhattan residents who enrolled in the WTC Registry had PTSD 2-3 years after the attacks. Residents who reported injury, witnessing horror, and dust cloud exposure were at increased risk for PTSD.
- Among children enrolled in the registry, those under five had twice the incidence of asthma as found among children under age five in the northeastern United States

These findings make clear that the health impacts of 9/11 are far reaching. The 2,200 people being treated through the Bellevue program establish that a significant number of those affected need continuing medical care.

I am concerned about both the delay in releasing funds to treat non-responders, as well as HHS’s recent withdrawal of a proposal to establish a better network of services for those whose health was affected by the 9/11 attacks and who are dispersed throughout the country. Both of these initiatives must move forward now if we are to make good on our obligations to those whose health has been affected by this national tragedy.

I am requesting that HHS immediately release funding for the Bellevue WTC Environmental Health Center so that non-responders suffering from the health impacts of 9/11 can continue to get the health care they need and deserve. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

MRB:wd

cc: The Honorable David Obey, Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Jim Walsh, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education
The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education
The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education
The Honorable Charles Schumer
The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
New York State Delegation, U.S. House of Representatives