

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

July 22, 2019

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I urge you to support the bipartisan Never Forget the Heroes: James Zadroga, Ray Pfeifer, and Luis Alvarez Permanent Authorization of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Act (S. 546). This legislation passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 402 to 12 (H.R. 1327).

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, the Pentagon and the Shanksville crash site to assist in rescue and recovery operations. These workers, residents and others were exposed to a toxic mix of dust and fumes from the crashes and collapse of the WTC and the subsequent fires, some of which lingered for months. The federal government told them the air was safe to breathe, and failed to enforce safety and health requirements. Now, more than 49,000 people who are in the World Trade Center Health Program are suffering from at least one certified 9/11 condition caused by toxins while a large percentage have multiple conditions, including serious respiratory diseases and cancer. Thousands more who have been diagnosed with cancer are only now joining the health program, so these numbers will increase dramatically.

Because of previous caps in the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, injured and ill 9/11 responders and survivors now are being compensated for their injuries at only 50% and 70% of what they are due. Further, these heroes will be unable to file claims after December 2020, which means those who become sick with cancer in January of 2021 will have nowhere to turn. This will have a devastating impact on those who are still suffering and have been waiting for the help they need and deserve.

The AFL-CIO opposes the amendment offered by Senator Lee, which would cap the funding of the program at \$10.2 billion for the first ten years, and then cap funding for the remainder of the life of the program to an additional \$10 billion, derails the very purpose of the fund. This amendment would force those who are sick and their families to approach Congress repeatedly in future years to beg for more funding. Previous caps on this program (in 2010 and 2015) led to 9/11 heroes not getting the help they were promised. The bipartisan bill – supported by 75 cosponsors – does not have a cap and provides coverage throughout the survivors' lifetime to avoid this very problem.

The AFL-CIO opposes the amendment offered by Senator Paul, which would require a \$2 billion across-the-budget cut to all federal programs for five years. Cutting funding from every program across the board will mean less funding for health research, less funding for defense, less funding for rural development and everything else that the government does. Passing the Paul amendment would also set a dangerous precedent in using across-the-board spending cuts to pay for programming. Republicans unanimously voted for a \$1.5 Trillion tax cut without paying for it and yet when the heroes of 9/11 need funding they now claim fiscal responsibility.

Both amendments are scheduled for floor consideration tomorrow and undermine the coverage our first responders deserve. We ask you to hold firm in moving this forward as a clean bill.

We strongly urge you to support S. 546 without amendment as a final step toward creating lifelong coverage for the heroes who responded on and in the days and months that followed September 11, 2001. These first responders did not limit their efforts in the wake of the tragedy on 9/11, and the US Senate should not impose an arbitrary cap on our efforts to help them and their families.

Sincerely,



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American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

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