

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 10, 2003

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge,

We are writing to follow up on the letter of May 23, 2003, sent by Congresswoman Maloney and Congressman Kind to you about the volunteers who selflessly risked their lives at the World Trade Center site after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and who are now experiencing serious health problems, a copy of which is enclosed.

As the *New York Daily News* of Monday, June 9, 2003, "State Stiffs WTC Angels" (copy enclosed) states, the problems of volunteers who came to New York to help in the aftermath of 9/11 are serious and unaddressed. The Mount Sinai Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine has been examining workers from Ground Zero for injuries that occurred from working at the site and of the 6,300 people reviewed, approximately 40% have respiratory problems resulting from work at Ground Zero. Of those that they have examined, officials at Mt Sinai estimated that about 10% screened were volunteers at Ground Zero.

Volunteers like Judy Wolff, a constituent of Representative Kind, traveled to New York City as a Red Cross volunteer to serve as a Family Services worker. Upon her return home, she experienced health problems including a persistent cough, bouts with pneumonia, and a weakened immune system. She recently went to New York City to participate in the medical exams that were being conducted by Mt. Sinai for volunteers and workers who have become ill since being at Ground Zero. According to Mrs. Wolff, she was told that she may possibly be ill for at least an additional three years, and that her immune system will be weak during that time. Mrs. Wolff also tested positive for RADS (Reactive Airways Dysfunction Syndrome), and is now using inhalers every day. Because of her chronic health problems, Mrs. Wolff has been unable to work, and her family is experiencing serious financial difficulties. Another volunteer, Richard Coyne of the East Village who volunteered as an ironworker at Ground Zero, has been experiencing respiratory problems, applied for workers compensation months ago, and has not heard from the State.

We believe that volunteers like Mrs. Wolff and others should receive assistance for their medical needs. We understand that the Red Cross, because of actions taken by Representative Kind and the press attention, has finally indicated that it will pay for a portion of her medical bills. However, its offer of assistance will not do much to relieve the financial burden of the Wolff family since she has not been able to work since becoming ill. We believe that more should be done to help Mrs. Wolff and volunteers like her. The attacks of September 11, 2001, were unprecedented, and we could not have foreseen all that would be required to recover. However, we can and should ensure that those who volunteered to help others receive the help that they need, and we should establish the necessary procedures to be prepared in the future to

ensure that other volunteers who give their time and energy will be taken care of if they become ill because of their service.

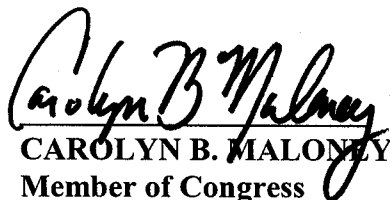
Therefore, we would like to know what the Department of Homeland Security can do or should be doing to help these individuals when they experience health problems because of their volunteer work after a terrorist attack. Since the administration has stated that another attack in the United States is inevitable, and given the important role that volunteers play in helping to recover from an attack, we would like to know what the Department can do to assist volunteers from the World Trade Center attack who we have been told are in similar situations. While it is our understanding that organizations like the Red Cross will pay for the medical expenses, for injuries such as a broken leg, of volunteers who have been injured while helping after a natural disaster, we have been told and the press reports indicate that the Red Cross and the Salvation Army are not currently paying the medical bills for other volunteers who helped at the World Trade Center site who are experiencing many of the health problems about which other first responders have complained or providing financial assistance for those who cannot work. Additionally, although Congress provided New York State with funds to help provide workers compensation for those injured, the Governor has not used these funds to provide compensation to these volunteers.


We have specific questions which we hope you can answer:

1. What is the policy of the Department of Homeland Security on assisting volunteers who have been injured at a natural disaster or a terrorist attack?
2. Will the Department of Homeland Security, under its responsibilities set forth by the Stafford Act since assuming the duties of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, provide either workers compensation or disability if that should be necessary or provide other financial assistance?
3. Are volunteers who worked at the World Trade Center site and who subsequently experienced respiratory or immune system problems being treated differently from volunteers from previous disasters who sustained injuries?
4. Based on the difficulties volunteers who worked at the World Trade Center site have experienced, what steps can the Department of Homeland Security take to provide for proper help for a volunteers in future attacks such as those on 9/11?

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

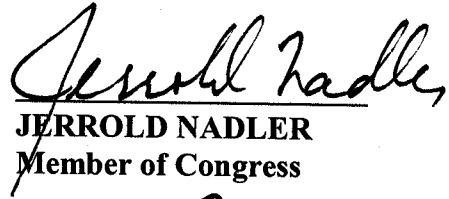
Sincerely,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress


RON KIND
Member of Congress



CHARLES RANGEL
Member of Congress



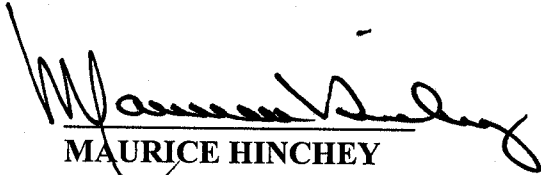
JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress



STEVE ISRAEL
Member of Congress



ANTHONY WEINER
Member of Congress



MAURICE HINCHEY
Member of Congress



EDOLPHUS TOWNS
Member of Congress

New York Daily News
State stiffens WTC aid
By GREG GITTRICH
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER
Monday, June 9th, 2003

The failing health of Judy Wolff is well-documented. She suffers from chest pains, shortness of breath and a weakened immune system. She has battled pneumonia repeatedly.

The moment the 46-year-old Wisconsin mom began feeling ill also is not in dispute. It was three days before she returned home from volunteering at Ground Zero.

"I have always been the one to help others," said Wolff, who handed out Red Cross vouchers near Ground Zero in October 2001. "Where is the help now that I need it?"

Hundreds of volunteers who gave all they could to New York after the Sept. 11 attacks are being shut out of state programs designed to cover medical bills and lost wages of those hurt at Ground Zero.

Although Congress gave New York \$150 million in emergency aid to pay for workers' compensation, the state has used only \$44 million of the money.

Confusing technicalities have prevented volunteers from being eligible for most of the funds - and not a cent of the \$25 million earmarked to help volunteers has been spent, the Daily News has learned.

"Here is one instance where Washington gave New York the money and it seems like New York is not using it to help all the people it should and could," said Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.).

Congressional researchers put out a memo last week concluding New York's workers' compensation law suggests that most of the federal funds cannot be used "to benefit volunteers."

The three-page document said, "In general, volunteers are not entitled to workers' compensation because they are not deemed to be employees."

In extreme cases, like Wolff's, the lack of financial assistance has forced volunteers to borrow thousands of dollars to pay mounting medical bills.

State Sen. Guy Velella (R-Bronx) introduced a bill in April to amend state law so volunteers could get help for specific medical conditions. A similar bill has been proposed in the Assembly.

Both have yet to win widespread support.

Fraction of aid spent

Congress gave New York the federal aid about four months after the twin towers collapsed. The money was divided essentially into two programs.

The state got \$125 million to process workers' compensation claims related to the attacks.

As of last week, \$44 million of that money had been spent, said Jon Sullivan, spokesman for the New York State Workers' Compensation Board.

Sullivan said the state also got \$25 million specifically to cover lost wages and medical benefits of volunteers. None of that money has been paid out.

Sullivan defended the state, noting the workers' compensation board has spent \$44 million resolving nearly 90% of the 7,335 Ground Zero-related claims it has handled so far. Among those are 2,093 death claims.

He said the board had gotten only a "small number" of inquiries from volunteers and had "sent acknowledgment letters" to those people.

But Scottie Hill, a social worker at Mount Sinai Medical Center, criticized the state, insisting that volunteers she has dealt with have yet to even be given case numbers - so their claims technically don't exist.

"Every volunteer that I've assisted has not received payment or authorization for medical coverage," Hill said. "It's really a problem. They need, need this medical coverage."

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), who helped secure the federal money, said she has been pressing the state board to get volunteers more assistance.

On Friday, she said her office "has been assured that volunteers and workers from out of state can apply for workers' compensation."

Without workers' compensation, little help exists for the volunteers, who fed weary firefighters, gave clothing to the displaced and risked their lives searching for the dead.

Their plight can be seen daily at Mount Sinai, which is screening World Trade Center volunteers and workers for health problems as part of a federally funded program.

Some 6,300 people had been seen as of last week. About 40% were found to have respiratory problems, including asthma and bronchitis. More than 50% suffer from posttraumatic stress syndrome.

"These are very high rates," said Dr. Stephen Levin, the occupational health specialist who oversees the program.

Mount Sinai officials estimated that about 10% of the people screened were volunteers around Ground Zero.

The hospital also has been giving free medical and mental health treatment to a couple of hundred volunteers and workers, using private funding. But a \$1 million grant from Bear Stearns is scheduled to run out this year.

An agonizing wait

Richard Coyne, 56, of the East Village said he hopes his workers' compensation claim will be approved by then.

Coyne speaks about his time volunteering as an ironworker at Ground Zero with a fragile voice. He often pauses and coughs uncontrollably.

"It feels like George Foreman is trying to punch his way through my lungs and out of my chest," he complained.

With help from Mount Sinai, Coyne said, he sent his workers' compensation forms to the state this year.

"It's been months," he said. "Nothing."