THE SEPTEMBER 11TH

Worker Protection Task Force

Annual Report

June 1, 2026

Introduction

The September 11th Worker Protection Task Force (Task Force) was established by the September 11th Worker Protection Task Force Act in 2005. The mission of the Task Force is to assess and identify possible solutions to address the long-term health, disability, and compensation needs of individuals who participated in rescue, recovery, or clean-up operations related to the September 11 attacks.

The Task Force has been an essential part of statewide policy discussions surrounding benefits for workers impacted by September 11th over the last two decades. The New York State Department of Labor assumed the responsibility of providing administrative support to the Task Force in 2026 as it continues focusing on those that answered the call to action 25 years ago on September 11, 2001.

History

Since the September 11th attacks 25 years ago, New York State and the federal government have taken important actions to ensure affected individuals receive care. Highlights of these actions include:

- Established in 2002, New York's World Trade Center Volunteer Fund provides benefits to volunteers through the state's Workers' Compensation Board for anyone who incurred lost wages and health related problems due to their rescue and recovery volunteer work at the World Trade Center site. Normally, unpaid volunteers are otherwise ineligible for workers' compensation benefits.[1]
- New York State continued providing for workers experiencing repercussions of the September 11th attacks through access to worker compensation benefits. As health impacts from work at the site are still emerging, the state allows for these individuals to seek assistance until September 11, 2026, under New York State Retirement and Social Security Law, and Workers Compensation Law.[2] Traditional worker compensation claims would require filing within two years of an incident. Due to the long-term impacts of exposure to the World Trade Center site, removing limitations around claim deadlines has been essential. New York State also provides disability pensions to public employees experiencing permanent incapacitation due to a September 11th related illness.[3]

[1] Workers' Compensation Board, "World Trade Center Assistance."
[2] Workers' Compensation Board, "World Trade Center Assistance."
[3] Off. N. Y. State Comptrol., "World Trade Center Presumption – World Trade Center Presumption | Office of the New York State Comptroller."

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s 9/11 World Trade Center Health Program provides comprehensive information regarding health consequences for workers at the World Trade Center and related sites. In 2018, the CDC released an inventory of 9/11 agents. These are chemical, biological, physical and other hazards identified by the WTC Health Program. The list was determined by the CDC after the agency identified and analyzed the hazards of numerous agents and experiences that may cause physical and psychological harm to responders, recovery workers, and survivors in the days, weeks, and months following the attacks.[4]
- In 2023, New York State granted former members of the Army and Air National Guard, New York Naval Militia, and New York Guard involved in the rescue, recovery, or cleanup operations at the World Trade Center site access to state-funded pension benefits should they develop an eligible 9/11 related illness.[5]
- In 2025, on the anniversary of the September 11th attacks, in addition to extending the Task Force until 2030, Governor Hochul signed legislation expediting New York's World Trade Center disability and death benefit application process for survivors, while also creating a new pathway to public service for the children and siblings of New York City sanitation workers who lost their lives due to exposure and cleanup after September 11th.[6]
- Long-term federal funding for the World Trade Center Health Program was secured through 2040, as part of H.R. 7148, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2026, signed into law in January 2026. As a result, potential cuts in services to September 11th responders and survivors were averted.[7]

[4] Lioy et al., "Toxins and Health Impacts of September 11."
[5] Spectrum News, "N.Y. National Guard Members Who Responded to Ground Zero Can Apply for Benefits."
[6] "In Honor of 9/11, Governor Hochul Signs Legislation to Support Families of 9/11 Victims | Governor Kathy Hochul | New York State."
[7] "World Trade Center Health Program 2025-2026 Budget Shortfall." 9/11 Health Watch, https://www.911healthwatch.org/zadroga-bill/2025-2026-budget-shortfall/.

Task Force Members

The Task Force is comprised of leaders from a variety of key stakeholder groups with diverse backgrounds and relevant subject matter expertise. The members of the task force as of June 1, 2026, are:

Member Name	Title, Organization	Appointing Authority
Dr. David Prezant, MD	Chief Medical Officer, FDNY	Governor
Andrew Ansbro	President, Uniformed Firefighters Association of Greater New York, Local 94 I.A.F.F. AFL-CIO	Governor
Suzy Spilker Ballantyne	Deputy Executive Director, 9/11 Health Watch	Governor
Marcos Soler	Executive Director, Center for Ethics and Rule of Law, University of Pennsylvania	Governor
Betty Carradero	Second Vice President, Police Benevolent Association of the City of New York	Governor
Patrick Hendry	President, Police Benevolent Association	Temporary President of the New York State Senate
James Brosi	President, Uniformed Fire Officers Association-IAFF Local 854	Temporary President of the New York State Senate
Gregory Floyd	President, Teamsters Local 237; Vice President at-Large, International Brotherhood of Teamsters	Temporary President of the New York State Senate
Peter Meringolo	Chairman, New York State Public Employee Conference	Speaker of the New York State Assembly
Deborah Williams	Director of Safety and Health, DC37 AFSCME	Speaker of the New York State Assembly
Gordon Warnock	President, Hudson Strategies Government Relations & Executive Director, Signal 30 Fund for the NYS Troopers PBA	Speaker of the New York State Assembly
Thomas DiNapoli	Comptroller, State of New York	Ex-Officio Member
Mark Levine	Comptroller, City of New York	Ex-Officio Member
Zohran Mamdani	Mayor, City of New York	Ex-Officio Member
Roberta Reardon	Commissioner, New York State Department of Labor	Ex-Officio Member
Dr. James V. McDonald, MD, MPH	Commissioner, New York State Department of Health	Ex-Officio Member
Blake Washington	Director, NYS Division of the Budget	Ex-Officio Member
Timothy Hogues	Commissioner, New York State Division of Civil Service	Ex-Officio Member
Dr. Michael Crane	Medical Director, Mt. Sinai Center for Occupational and Environmental Health	Ex-Officio Member

Some Ex-Officio members have been represented by designees over the period of time covered by this report (February – June 2026). Full attendee information is available through the Task Force Meeting minutes posted on the September 11th Worker Protection Task Force website available here: https://dol.ny.gov/bc/911wptf.

Task Force Responsibilities

The Task Force was created in 2005 to review and examine evidence regarding the adverse health effects among workers involved in September 11th related operations, including the consideration to compensate these workers properly.

The duties of the Task Force are:

- To obtain and analyze statistical and qualitative data from the New York State and New York City Departments of Health, as well as additional sources, on the health and disability status of workers involved in September 11th related operations including the health impacts related to air exposure at the site;
- To identify and examine limitations in any existing laws, regulations, programs and services related to disability and coverage, as well as provide recommendations for addressing these limitations;
- To receive and consider reports and testimony from individuals, health agencies, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders statewide, to learn more about the diagnosis, care and treatment of such workers; and
- To identify federal funding sources to assist in paying costs associated with disability benefits.

In 2020, the Task Force duties were expanded to include identifying and examining the:

- Average processing times for disability claims;
- Lack of coverage for employees who participated in rescue, recovery, or clean-up operations in either a professional or volunteer capacity;
- Opportunities to synchronize various World Trade Center related benefit programs at the federal and state level; and
- To develop methods for identifying all participants in the rescue, recovery, or clean-up operations.

2026 Task Force Activities

The Task Force held two public meetings in lower Manhattan and Albany, elected a Chair and Vice-Chair, and brought to the forefront a number of key topics for further discussion and consideration.

A website maintained by the New York State Department of Labor on behalf of the Task Force is available here: https://dol.ny.gov/bc/911wptf . The website includes information such as upcoming meeting agendas, minutes from previous meetings, and archived meeting video.

Public Meeting #1: February 18, 2026

This was the first meeting in more than 10 years. After New York State Department of Labor Commissioner Reardon offered welcoming remarks and reviewed the charge, members discussed healthcare and service access challenges impacting various workers. There was also discussion of the availability of quality healthcare tailored to the specific health needs of those impacted by the attacks outside the New York City metro area.

Public Meeting #2: May 13, 2026

During this meeting, the Task Force continued identifying both primary concerns and future goals, and considered options to explore recently available research.

The Task Force agreed an immediate concern is presumptive eligibility for certain accidental disability and retirement benefits for workers affected by the September 11th attacks. The laws that provide these protections are scheduled to sunset on September 11, 2026. Members expressed support for their extension with some suggesting the renewals follow the federal guidelines under the Zadroga Act.

Additional discussion around benefits included equal access to unlimited sick leave and continued concern regarding proof of benefit eligibility for certain workers.

The Task Force welcomed Joe Cavalcante, Ombudsman/Advocate for Injured Workers with the New York State Workers' Compensation Board and heard his presentation on recent claim data from those public workers eligible to receive workers' compensation benefits following their participation in rescue and recovery at the September 11th site.

Finally, the Task Force elected Suzy Ballantyne and James Brosi as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

Appointed by the Governor to the Task Force in 2008, Suzy Ballantyne is one of the longest serving members. She is the Deputy Executive Director of 9/11 Health Watch,

advocating for a strong federal response for workers who were affected by the attacks at the World Trade Center site. She previously spent over 25 years at the New York State AFL-CIO as the Director of Government Affairs.

Appointed to the Task Force by the Temporary President of the State Senate in 2024, FDNY Deputy Chief James Brosi is the President of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association. He has served with the FDNY for over 30 years and is committed to protecting the long-term health of firefighters and fire officers, including those that were impacted by the September 11th attacks.

Setting a Path

Task Force members identified some topics for future discussion, including:

1. **Pension Cost Burden.** Without assistance from the federal government, New York State and New York City pension systems have been left to bear the direct costs of September 11th through payment of death and disability claims for first responders and other public employees. These increased costs, calculated in June 2023 at over $3 billion, are currently being shouldered by New York taxpayers alone.

2. **Health Impact Research.** Continued research is needed into the long-term health effects on those workers that participated in rescue and recovery at the World Trade Center site. Long-term conditions continue to emerge. Physical and mental health conditions including PTSD, dementia, auto-immune and cardiac diseases are all on the rise among individuals who participated in the rescue and recovery efforts at the September 11th site. [8,9]

3. **Expanded Benefit Access**. Making benefits accessible remains a primary concern for Task Force members. As research increases around the full health repercussions of working at the September 11th site, the Task Force expressed an interest in monitoring the expansion of the qualified diseases listed under New York State Disability Law. In addition to qualified diseases, members recognize that requirements for proving an individual was at the site have been difficult for some to meet. Task Force members are interested in how to

[8] Giesinger et al., "Association Between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Mortality Among Responders and Civilians Following the September 11, 2001, Disaster."
[9] Clouston et al., "Incidence of Dementia Before Age 65 Years Among World Trade Center Attack Responders."

decrease the burden of proof for those that are still experiencing barriers to access.

4. **Staffing.** Despite the inclusion of secure funding for the World Trade Center Health Program, there has been a significant reduction in staff serving the World Trade Center Health Program.[10] In addition to a letter from New York Congressional representatives requesting a public hearing on this issue, Governor Hochul and several members of the Task Force called on the federal government to fully staff the CDC team responsible for this work. [11] Monitoring this situation is of interest to the Task Force.

[10] Daniel, "Lawmakers Ask RFK Jr. for Hearing on Problems at 9/11 Health Agency."

[11] "Governor Hochul Calls for Restoration of 9/11 Health Program Staff as Trump Administration Shifts Personnel to Immigration Enforcement Agency | Governor Kathy Hochul."

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