

Remarks to STAC by 911 Health Watch Executive Director June 21st, 2023

My name is Benjamin Chevat, I am Executive Director of 911 Health Watch, Inc., a 501 C3 not-for-profit created by the New York State AFL CIO and its affiliated unions.

Our organization is dedicated to making sure that the goal of providing quality medical care and compensation for injured and ill 9/11 responders and survivors, – embodied in the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010 and its reauthorization in 2015 and 2019 – is met.

Thank you for this opportunity to give public comments at this meeting of the World Trade Center Health Program Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) meeting discussion of the new youth research cohort being established by the WTC Health Program.

First, I want to thank Senators Gillibrand and Schumer, former Representative Carolyn Maloney and Congressmen Jerrold Nadler and Andrew Garbarino for their efforts to get Congress to authorize the establishment and development of a new cohort.

Their efforts to include the authorization of this new cohort as part of last year's Omnibus funding bill was key to finally allowing the World Trade Center Health Program the ability to adequately research the health impacts of the toxins at Ground Zero on the local community of residents and those who were under 21 at the time of the attack and its aftermath.

As the leadership of NIOSH understands and has repeatedly stated, there is currently not a sufficient and representative cohort that can provide an adequate scientific basis for research on the impact of the toxins on this population.

Among the approximately 360,000 World Trade Center survivors were more than 35,000 people who were children at the time of the attack and the aftermath, who resided or attended school or daycare in the NYC disaster area.

Children were extremely vulnerable to harm from both toxic exposures and psychological trauma and there are continuing reports of health impacts, including some that are severe, to this population now that they are adults.

However, the program did not have a suitable research tool to do the job and needed authorization by Congress to create this research cohort we are discussing

today to be used to study the impact of the toxins at Ground Zero on this population. Now thru the Senators and Representatives efforts it can.

Today's meeting is the beginning of the process to create this research tool and we are looking forward to hearing the discussion today by the STAC.

We want to applaud Dr Howard and the staff for the outreach they have been conducting on this, seeking input from the community with calling this STAC meeting their requests for information.

Our main concern going forward with developing this cohort are the challenges in recruiting members for this cohort now 22 years after the attack.

We know that early attempts at this did not produce the numbers of possible cohort members that we will need to see for this to be successful.

Our suggestion, rather than initially relying on one vendor to assemble the cohort, is that the program should hold a competition between possible vendors before embarking on a single contractor.

This way the program could test different approaches and select the best methods based on actual real-world experience.

Or perhaps some small initial grants to try to experiment with different outreach methods to see which would be more effective to make sure that the population recruited reflects the exposed population especially with respect to communities of color.

This is something we understand that NIOSH has extensive experience within the area of protective gear with their recent NIOSH mask innovation challenge as well as its crowdsourcing competition to improve respirator fit evaluations.

While this would initially delay moving forward with assembling the cohort, it would allow for a more likely successful outcome by having a competition between vendors to test recruitment methods on the different populations.

We look forward to today's discussion.