

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 19, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write to request a Congressional briefing from your agency regarding the current operational status of the World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP) and to seek information regarding reported delays in care affecting survivors and responders, as well as staffing shortages and reassignments impacting the Program's ability to comprehensively serve for the 9/11 community.

As you know, the World Trade Center Health Program, which was established by the [James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010](#), currently serves approximately 140,000 survivors and responders. The Program provides medical monitoring and treatment for individuals who were exposed to toxins and contaminants in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. This includes survivors and responders who suffer from respiratory illnesses, cancers, or any other conditions as a result of their exposure to 9/11 related toxins.

As you are also aware, Congress recently took action to address the impending funding shortfall facing the Program by passing legislation with strong bipartisan support that provided additional funding—ensuring long-term stability.<sup>1</sup> However, reported staffing shortages, reassignments, and other issues severely weaken and undermine the Program's ability to provide timely services and care for current beneficiaries and potential enrollees.<sup>2</sup>

According to public reports, the WTCHP is facing significant and prolonged staffing shortages. Specifically, the WTCHP is currently only staffed by 84 employees despite having an authorized staffing level of 120 total positions, leaving approximately 30 percent of the Program's positions vacant. This is a troubling statistic given that the number of individuals enrolled in the Program and seeking medical care and attention for their health conditions [continues to grow](#) year after year – reaching all-time highs in enrollment.

To add onto these concerns, reports also indicate that certain WTCHP personnel have been temporarily reassigned to other work that is unrelated to Program itself; including work overseen by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Indian Health Services.<sup>3</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Neporent, "Congress secures long-term funding for the World Trade Center Health Program," ABC News, February 5, 2026, <https://abcnews.com/Health/congress-secures-long-term-funding-world-trade-center/story?id=129880721>

<sup>2</sup> Laura Figueroa Hernandez, "GOP reps want Kennedy to address WTC Health Program staffing shortfall," Newsday, March 12, 2026, <https://www.newsday.com/long-island/politics/world-trade-center-health-program-staff-shortfall-gop-reps-want-kennedy-to-address-staffing-shortfall-reports-laura-figueroa-hernandez-id>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Tracy, "Gutted 9/11 World Trade Center Health program now reassigning staff to ICE: advocates say," New York Daily News, March 14, 2026, <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-dn-gutted-world-trade-center->

completely unreasonable to temporarily reassign personnel working on a Program that is already facing staffing shortages. This move only exacerbates the existing staffing shortages and ultimately contributes to delays in enrollment processing and health care for patients. In fact, it is reported that some individuals who have been denied enrollment into the Program have already been waiting for more than one year for their appeals to be processed.

As the nation will soon come together to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 11 attacks, it is the shared responsibility of both Congress and your agency to ensure that the brave survivors and responders receive the quality healthcare and support that they were promised and deserve.

To better understand the status of the WTCHP and your Department's specific plans to address concerns outlined in this letter, we request a congressional briefing from the appropriate Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) officials. We respectfully request that this briefing take place as soon as possible. We also request answers to the following questions and requests, which can be addressed either in writing or at the briefing, once scheduled:

1. It is our understanding that the Program was staffed with 93 filled positions when you assumed your role as Secretary and after several months following your firing and rehiring of essential personnel, including Dr. John Howard—a Trump appointee—the staff level is now at 84 filled positions. Please confirm whether this number is accurate.
2. We further understand that the program is currently authorized to fulfill a staffing level of 120 personnel to handle the processing of applications from thousands of new 9/11 responders and survivors that have applied to enroll in the Program over the last few years. Please confirm whether this is correct.
3. Please confirm how many WTCHP personnel have been temporarily reassigned to other agencies or departments since January 2025. Please provide details regarding the nature of these temporary reassignments including how the length of their reassignment and the agency, department, or program they will be supporting through their reassignment.
4. What is the current backlog or queue of enrollment applications? What are the current wait times for individuals seeking medical certifications for their conditions? What is the average wait time for enrollment appeals to be processed?
  - a. Please also provide information regarding the number of survivors and responders that are currently waiting for their appeals to be heard.
5. Please provide the status of petitions, if any, that are being reviewed to add additional health conditions to the list of covered conditions that are eligible to receive medical care and treatment under the WTCHP.
  - a. It is our understanding that in December 2024, the program announced that there would be determinations made in March 2025 on pending petitions that were filed by Program Clinic Directors to add to the list of covered conditions including cardiac, autoimmune, and cognitive conditions that have now been pending certifications for over three years. Thousands of our constituents believe that these

conditions are a result of their 9/11-related exposure and they deserve to know if whether their conditions will be covered and if not, they deserve to know the reason behind such determination.

6. What actions, if any, has HHS/CDC taken to address any outstanding reimbursement issues faced by participating medical providers tasked with providing healthcare services to enrollees?
7. Please provide a status update regarding research-related grant funding. Specifically, under the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010, approximately 20 million dollars per year are provided for the purpose of awarding grants that fund studies and investigations into whether additional conditions should be added to the list of covered conditions, as well as ways to improve services for those in the Program. Normally the process of awarding these grants begins in March before the fiscal year that they are to be awarded in. As of today, it is our understanding that there has been NO action taken by the Program to award these grants since you have assumed your role as Secretary. Please provide an explanation regarding the barriers facing the grant-awarding process and a specific timeline that outlines when this funding will be awarded.
8. It is evident that the WTCHP continues to face ongoing issues. Please provide any additional explanation about why the Program continues to be heavily mismanaged and the impacts of these shortfalls on health and administrative services.

We look forward to scheduling a congressional briefing as soon as possible and appreciate your swift attention to these important issues. We are hopeful that we can work together to ensure that as we quickly approach the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the terrible September 11 attacks on our nation this vital program can continue to provide quality care for the 9/11 survivor and responder community.

Sincerely,



Dan Goldman  
Member of Congress



Terrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



Grace Meng  
Member of Congress



Laura A. Gillen  
Member of Congress



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Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress



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Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress



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George Latimer  
Member of Congress



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Thomas R. Suozzi  
Member of Congress