

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2026

Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write to request a congressional briefing on the steps the administration is taking to strengthen the World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP) and to address recent reports that operational challenges are limiting access to care for responders and survivors. Following the enactment of H.R. 7148, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2026, which supports the program's long-term stability, we believe this is an important opportunity to build on that progress.

As you are aware, Congress established the WTCHP through the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act to ensure that those exposed to toxic substances at Ground Zero receive timely medical monitoring, treatment, and research-informed care. Today, the program serves nearly 140,000 responders and survivors nationwide in every State and in 434 out of 435 Congressional Districts. It remains a moral commitment of the federal government. Consistent with that obligation, the WTCHP has historically operated with strong bipartisan support and without any findings of fraud or abuse.

In passing H.R. 7148, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2026, Congress acted on a bipartisan basis to close the WTCHP's projected funding deficit. By signing the bill into law, President Trump has ensured the program will have sufficient resources to operate without interruption through 2040. We appreciate the Administration's engagement to preserve the long-term stability of the WTCHP, including ensuring continued leadership under Dr. John Howard. Collectively, these efforts provide much-needed certainty to 9/11 responders and survivors nationwide.

Despite this progress, recent reporting and outreach from program participants, providers, and advocates raise concerns about operational challenges that may be affecting the program's ability to fully deliver on its mission. We believe these issues merit attention and resolution. A strengthened WTCHP supports the responders and survivors who answered the call on 9/11, and delivers on the administration's objectives of honoring the heroes who serve our country.

Reports indicate that the program is operating with staffing levels well below authorized capacity, even as enrollment continues to grow. Specifically, *Newsday* reports that of 120 authorized positions, only 84 staff are currently employed. This comes at a time when enrollment has grown by roughly 20,000 participants over the past two years, with an additional 10,000 expected in 2026. These staffing shortfalls have coincided with widespread delays in treatment authorizations, backlogs in claims processing, disruptions in continuity of care, and reduced oversight of contractors.

We also understand that program staff members who are Public Health Service Officers have been temporarily reassigned to immigration enforcement activities and the Indian Health Service, including the Deputy Director of the program. These reassignments further exacerbate the program staff shortage and harmful wait times for patients. Responders and survivors suffering from cancers and other life-threatening 9/11-related conditions

have reported waiting months for appointments or approvals. These delays can have devastating medical consequences.

Additionally, we are aware of 9/11 responders and survivors who were denied enrollment in the program and have been waiting more than a year for their appeals to be processed. These delays, many of which are still ongoing, appear to be due to staffing challenges affecting CDC personnel assigned to appeals. The heroes of 9/11 deserve the same dedication and responsiveness they showed nearly 25 years ago.

We are also concerned by reports of continuing challenges within the Nationwide Provider Network (NPN). Providers report delayed or denied reimbursements, a lack of transparency in claims resolution, and administrative burdens that have led to growing dissatisfaction and attrition. Addressing these issues would help strengthen provider participation and rebuild trust between the program and the medical professionals essential to its success. It would also reaffirm the administration's commitment to the WTCHP, as evidenced by actions to maintain the operations of Clinical Centers of Excellence and NPN.

Recognizing these challenges, the House Appropriations Committee included report language accompanying the fiscal year 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services bill. These actions include developing metrics on provider retention and enrollee complaints, assessing NPN contractor performance and accountability, and ensuring sufficient administrative resources are dedicated to the program to protect continuity of care.

Finally, we seek updates on three petitions, filed in September 2023 and February 2025, requesting the addition of new conditions, including autoimmune, cardiac, and cognitive impairments. On behalf of our constituents who have been waiting for a determination on these conditions, we would like to know when these decisions will be made.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request a congressional briefing from the appropriate HHS and CDC officials responsible for WTCHP administration. The purpose of the briefing would be to open a dialogue on current operational challenges, the steps being taken to address them, and how Congress can continue to support these important efforts. We ask that this briefing include Members of Congress and staff at your earliest availability.

The men and women served by the WTCHP ran toward danger on September 11th and in its aftermath. As we mark the 25th anniversary this September and celebrate America 250, we have an important opportunity to demonstrate our nation's commitment to those who served. Addressing operational challenges that may delay care, discourage providers, or disrupt research would honor both congressional intent and the administration's objectives of supporting our nation's heroes. We look forward to working together to ensure the WTCHP functions as Congress intended and as survivors and responders deserve.

We welcome the opportunity to work together and respectfully request your prompt response to arrange a congressional briefing. Thank you for your attention to this matter and efforts to preserve this critical program.

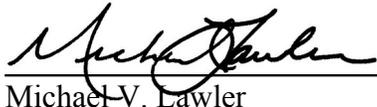
Sincerely,



Nick LaLota
Member of Congress



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



Michael V. Lawler
Member of Congress



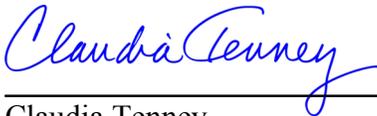
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