CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

September 28, 2006

The Honorable Peter T. King, Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Pete:

As negotiations continue on H.R. 4954, the SAFE Port Act, I respectfully request that the final bill include language to establish medical monitoring programs to assess, monitor, and study the health and safety of emergency managers and emergency response providers following Incidents of National Significance. Language authorizing such programs was included in the SAFE Port Act as adopted by the Senate.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, I recently held an oversight hearing of the federally-funded medical monitoring and registry programs that were established following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Among our witnesses were Dr. John Howard, Director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Dr. Robin Herbert, Co-Director of the World Trade Center Worker and Volunteer Medical Screening Program at Mt. Sinai Medical Center, the GAO, New York City officials, and Ground Zero responders and residents. The witnesses' testimony to the Subcommittee clearly demonstrated the significant health challenges faced by Ground Zero responders, as well as the need for their continued health monitoring.

The day before our hearing, the Mount Sinai Medical Center released its study of Ground Zero responders, which found that almost 70 percent suffered respiratory problems as a direct result of their response. The report clearly illustrates that large-scale disasters create the potential for long-term health and environmental hazards. While responders to the 9/11 attacks benefit from medical monitoring programs established soon thereafter, those responding to any future disasters lack any similar screening program.

Congressman
Christopher Shays
Fourth District Connecticut

Offices:

10 Middle Street, 11th Floor
Bridgeport, CT 06604–4223

Government Center
888 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, CT 06901–2927

1126 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515–0704

Telephones:

BRIDGEPORT: 579–5870
NORWALK: 866–6469
RIDGEFIELD: 438–5953
SHELTON: 402–0426
STAMFORD: 357–8277
WASHINGTON, DC: 202/225–5541

E-mail:

rep.shays@mail.house.gov

Internet:

www.house.gov/shays

Establishing medical monitoring programs following large-scale disasters will help save lives by allowing for the early detection and treatment of any potential physical or mental health impact, providing first responders with information to prevent long-term illness and disability. Such a program would also lead to new ways to prevent harmful exposures from future disasters.

The Senate has voted on multiple occasions to protect the health and safety of first responders through the establishment of medical monitoring programs, passing an amendment to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, as part of the Collins amendment to the Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07) Homeland Security Appropriations Act, and most recently as an amendment to the SAFE Port Act.

Our nation's emergency responders respond to national disasters regardless of what unseen dangers and health hazards await, and without concern for their own personal safety. They will not hesitate to protect the public from harm, and neither should we hesitate to protect their health and well-being. I urge you to include the Voinovich amendment in the final version of the SAFE Port Act to ensure our nation's emergency responders receive the care they need and deserve.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Member of Congress

CS:dn

cc: Speaker Dennis Hastert