

MOMENTUM GROWS TO PROVIDE WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS WITH COVID-19

As of this morning, over 320,000 New Yorkers have fallen ill with COVID-19. Over 20,000 have died. Many of those are people who were deemed “essential workers” and told to report to work even as others were told to stay home to stay safe from the pandemic. These are our health care workers, transit workers, delivery people, civil servants, police, fire, sanitation, grocery employees, utility workers and many more.

Our elected officials regularly salute these essential workers as heroes. Signs with words of appreciation are appearing at nursing homes and hospitals everywhere. New York City residents shower health care workers with applause at shift change every night at 7 PM.

But one critical thing is still missing: providing compensation and medical protection for the essential workers who have fallen ill with COVID-19, and providing compensation for the families of those who have died because they were deemed essential and told to report to work.

On April 17, 2020, we published an Op Ed in the New York Daily News calling on New York State to make sure that essential workers are covered by the workers' compensation system:

<https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-coronavirus-victims-compensation-fund-20200417-aeg3qq6uozdvxccwarwruhjvr4-story.html>

On April 26, so did the New York Workers' Compensation Alliance, of which our managing partner is the former chair:

<https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Viewpoint-Use-workers-comp-to-protect-front-line-15227693.php>

On April 28, the World Health Organization called not only for worker safety and health protections during the pandemic, but also for workers' compensation coverage as an occupational disease in order to compensate the affected workers and their families:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/28-04-2020-who-calls-for-healthy-safe-and-decent-working-conditions-for-all-health-workers-amidst-covid-19-pandemic>

On May 3, the New York State AFL/CIO published an Op Ed with the same goal:

<https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Viewpoint-Honor-front-line-workers-by-securing-15243743.php>

So far, thirteen other states have taken steps to significantly expand workers' compensation laws, regulations, and administration to make sure that their essential workers are covered. The list

includes California, Minnesota, Illinois, Alaska, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, North Dakota, Utah, Washington State, and Wisconsin.

Meanwhile, New York has done nothing to guarantee that essential workers who fall ill will be protected by its workers' compensation law. Until it does, all of the words saluting our essential workers are just that: words. As Benjamin Franklin observed, "well done is better than well said."

It's time for New York to do well for our essential workers, not just speak well of them.