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Senators, Congressman, Distinguished Guests, Fellow First Responders, Ladies & Gentleman:

My name is Charles Giles, and I am one of the First Responders of 9/11. I am 40 years old and a resident of Barnegat Township, NJ. I am here today with my wife Diane, and my daughters Kaitlin & Clarissa, as well as my extended family, my fellow Responders and Rescue Workers. I have been involved in all aspects of Emergency Medical Services for over 16 years. It was always my dream to be in EMS, and that dream had been fully realized until my career was cut short by the events of 9/11.

9/11 was an unspeakable day; truly the most horrible day of mine or anyone else's life. My version of it started when I witnessed a vision I will never forget: an airliner slamming into the second tower and the inferno fireball that accompanied it. At that point, utter chaos took over: the resulting mayhem, terror, and carnage were on a scale that seems indescribable now when I look back on it. But at the time, I remember thinking: *This is what I am trained for, and I will do whatever it takes to help, even if it means losing my life.*

As I and countless others got down to the business of attending to the dying and wounded, an unthinkable event occurred: the collapse of the first tower. I and others ran for our lives, only to return after the dust had settled to assist the newly-injured. What we returned to was utter devastation. In spite of the overwhelming conditions, we did what we had to do. During this new phase of the disaster, I found myself in the second tower trying to resuscitate a downed firefighter, when the unthinkable occurred AGAIN: the collapse of the second tower. This time it was my turn to be saved: a Port Authority Policeman was my guardian angel, carrying my severely burned body out of the rubble to be dispatched to Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx.

I was administered to at the hospital, but signed myself out the same day to return to Ground Zero to be where I belonged with my brothers and sisters the First Responders. I stayed through the night, then returned the next day, and the day after that, over and over until January 2002, when I turned in my badge. I had seen and done enough; I could do no more.

At that point, I had to leave the city. My family and I settled into a small ranch house in Barnegat, New Jersey. The house felt safe and comfortable--somewhere we could grow old in. But in late 2002, I was hospitalized for severe chest pains and shortness of breath. Thus began a medical Odyssey which has followed me to this day: I was placed on the oral steroid Prednisone. I have never been able to stop taking it. 6 years, 7 Diagnoses, and 13 Hospitalizations later, I stand before you a sick & dying man.

I take 20 medications a day. I had a total right hip replacement last March due to Avascular Necrosis & osteoporosis--the effects of using Prednisone for a long period of time. Now I am pending a right knee & left hip replacement. A recent bronchoscopy resulted in a collapsed lung and disturbing clinical findings which will be revealed to me in an upcoming meeting in the presence of members of the CDC the Centers for Disease Control.

With my health in ruins, I have not been able to work, and our financial situation has spiraled downward. To this day, I have received neither Workmen's Compensation, nor Social Security. Last month, we were forced to foreclose on our home, selling at \$52,000 under market value. Losing our home was shattering for all of us, but especially to my wife and daughters. Now we live in an apartment, which we could not even obtain by our own means, because of ruined credit from all the medical bills. No, this lease had to be vouched for by the mayor of the township, who intervened on our behalf to say: *this is an honorable 9/11 Family who did service to their country; and who now needs a roof over their head.* Without this gentleman's kindness and intervention, I honestly do not know where we would be living today.

To continue to survive, my family counts on the generosity of organizations like the *Fealgood Foundation, We Are Change* & members of our own community, who contribute to a benefit fund set up by the town Fire Department. For this we are humbled and grateful, even though it is painful to accept charity to survive. We accept the charity because we have NO OTHER CHOICE it is either that, or face homelessness. Still, in spite of the support of others, it is an ongoing strain: worrying about the rent and utilities, how we will get food on the table, or clothes and school supplies for the girls.

As well as losing my health, job and home, I have lost faith. Faith in my government, to be exact. And you know what? That is a sad thing to say: that you have truly 100% lost faith in something. But it is a fact of my life, and a fact of life for thousands of members of this 9/11 Community. When we are told by the government that our health problems, and unemployment problems, and bankruptcies and psychological problems are *not 9/11-related*, it is a slap in the face to every 9/11 Responder who set foot at Ground Zero. Yet we are told that, time and again. We are told that over and over; while, meanwhile, our entire lives--and the lives of our families--are going down. Down and down and down. I tell you, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a shame, it is a National Disgrace.

Listen to this: I know one fellow 9/11 Responder who gave up his newborn daughter for adoption... because he could not afford to feed her. Now I stand before you, and ask: Is that, or is that not---a National Disgrace?

Our community is not entirely without allies. Representatives Maloney, Nadler, and Fossella have been staunch in speaking out repeatedly for 9/11 Health. Senators Clinton and Kennedy have stood shoulder to shoulder with those representatives on occasion as well. It is also heartening to have Congressman Kucinich with us here today. But we need *every* member of government to wake up to our urgent message: We the 9/11 Community need Help, and we need it NOW. We need leaders in government to *take the lead* in addressing this crisis head on. Does this mean funding? *Yes*. Does this mean 9/11 Health Care? *Yes*. Does this mean a National network, to address the needs of those who came to Ground Zero from far and wide? *Yes, yes and yes again.*

In closing, I would like to mention a final thing: the D word: *Dignity*. I know I speak for the community when I say we want a little dignity thrown our way. We want the dignity, not of heroes, but of regular people – the regular people that we are. And when it's my turn to go, I want to die with dignity--in my own home, not out on the streets. And I want my loved ones, my wife and daughters, to be taken care of with dignity--the way I would have taken care of them, till the end. It's the right thing – the ONLY thing to do. Dignity, and Respect: it's all anybody can hope for, and it's all, that we--the 9/11 Community--are asking for.

...Thank you very much, and God Bless...