

9/11 First Responders Demand Invites to 10th Anniversary Ceremony

Plenty of controversy has surrounded New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Aug. 15 announcement regarding the memorial ceremony to be held at Ground Zero. For the first time since the 9/11 tragedy, first responders will not be invited. He has also banned clergy and prayer from the event. But two organizations are doing something about the mayor's plan and launching petitions to fight back against it.

An explosive campaign on , a platform for social change, calls on Bloomberg to invite first responders to Sept. 11 memorial ceremony, while the Family Research Council has gathered more than 55,000 signed petitions that join New York City Councilman Fernando Cabrera's efforts to urge Bloomberg to reverse his decision to prevent clergy and first responders from participating in the Ground Zero commemoration.

A Bloomberg spokesman stated that due to space constraints the commemoration ceremony would be for victims' families, while a separate ceremony would be held for first responders at a later time and different location.

More than 1,500 people have joined the popular campaign, launched by Jack Dewan Jr., a Boston firefighter and nephew of the late Gerard "Gerry" Dewan, FDNY Ladder #3, who gave his life on 9/11.

"On the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11, the first responders who were there that day and survived are not welcome to grieve the loss of their friends and co-workers," Dewan says.

Dewan and his family were invited to the ceremony due to the loss of a family member, but the firefighter has refused to

attend an event where the other firefighters in his uncle's ladder are not invited.

"I will be at the firehouse, where the firefighters continue to do the right thing and carry on the legacy of their friends and coworkers with pride and dignity," he explains.

News of the online petition campaign's success is likely to increase pressure on Bloomberg's office.

"To not give them a seat at the ceremony is absolutely a slap in the face to every one of those men and women that did what they had to do that day," wrote member Samantha Flores in the petition comments. "And it's a slap in the face to all of them that died or were injured saving other peoples' lives."

Human Rights Organizer Sarah Marie Ryan says: "It's no surprise this campaign would attract so much attention. One can see from the comments on the petition that this issue is not just close to the hearts of first responders but to those Americans across the country affected by the events on Sept. 11. Mr. Dewan's petition on seems to have given many an outlet to show their solidarity with the 9/11 first responders."