NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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The City and the Widows

Mayor Giuliani was right to decline to name a city "special liaison" to relatives of civilians slain in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

An organization called Give Your Voice, made up of relatives of the 3,000 civilian victims, claims that the city has given more attention to concerns of the uniformed victims' families.

Of course Giuliani has been concerned for the bereaved relatives of firefighters and policemen. They died in the line of duty, protecting their fellow citizens. And he's the ultimate boss for city workers.

This doesn't mean that the mayor is unconcerned about the grief of civilians' families. It means that part of his duty is recognizing and respecting the sacrifices the Finest and the Bravest have made.

As the mayor said, the Family Assistance Center addresses the specific needs of civilian survivors and relatives.

Some of the bereaved are understandably frustrated that many questions aren't answered quickly enough. Their loss is heartbreaking.

But responding to more than 3,000 families — with city, state, federal and nonprofit agencies all involved in the process — is an enormous task.

City policy — or state and federal, for that matter — should not be focused exclusively on the feelings of victims' families.

The city itself has also suffered major losses — economically, especially — and restoring the city as a whole has to be the prime focus.

Give Your Voice — *and* the relatives of firefighters and police officers — must understand that "rights" belong to the living.

The duty of elected officials is to protect and lead the living.

That's why the mayor was correct last month when he cut back on the number of firefighters and cops who were retrieving remains at ground zero: It is dangerous to have too many people at the site who aren't directly working on the cleanup.

He backed down slightly when cop and firefighter widows protested. But the total number working at ground zero there is still down — as it should be.

Hard as it may be to understand, the sentiments of family, friends and comrades necessarily cannot be permitted to drive municipal policy-making to the exclusion of all else.

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