May 25, 1955

Honorable Herbert H. Lehman
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Lehman:

I understand that the Bureau of Labor Statistics' proposed appropriation for 1956, now under consideration by your Committee, includes a request for funds to expand and improve the Bureau's work-injury statistics. This request was not granted by the House.

Although it has been the Bureau's traditional function to compile information relating to industrial accidents, very little progress has been made in this field by the Bureau for some years. Specifically, the proposal is to increase the output of information on the causes of accidents for use in accident prevention. The program would be carried on in cooperation with the various State Labor Departments.

Some progress is being made in accident prevention, but we still have a long way to go. In 1954, the best year on record, 14,000 persons died from work injuries, 76,000 experienced some permanent impairment and 1,770,000 were temporarily disabled. These have cost the National economy a loss of 190,000,000 man-days of production and, according to the National Safety Council, the burden on employers has been $3,000,000,000 a year. The costs to the injured workers, their families and public assistance agencies are unknown quantities but unquestionably are huge.

As you no doubt already know, New York is one of the six States currently participating in a cooperative State-Federal work-injury rate survey with the Bureau of Labor Statistics. We in New York have benefitted from this arrangement. In turn, Federal statistics have been strengthened by New York's contribution to the joint operation. The arrangement places a minimum of reporting burden upon New York employers. A single report from each firm serves both the State's needs and the need for national data. Similar arrangements with other States will yield similar benefits in those jurisdictions.
Accident-cause information, one of the tools of safety engineers, has never been provided in the volume and detail needed. If the Bureau of Labor Statistics could do more studies of the causes of accidents, particularly in industries where the rates are very high, both our own State safety officers and the safety engineers in private industry would be helped in making their accident-prevention activities more effective.

As for workmen's compensation, there are simply no adequate statistics to tell anyone what is going on nationally, or to make comparisons of the results achieved under the various State laws.

The State data which are now available are not comparable. If authoritative facts were available, they might help resolve many of the differences of opinion that now prevail relative to workmen's compensation and also help State legislators and administrators in arriving at decisions in this field.

I am sure that the States would welcome the technical leadership of the Bureau of Labor Statistics in accident and compensation statistics. It is the only agency that can put these statistics on a comparable basis. At present, the Bureau has only a very small staff and what it can do is too limited. I hope that your Committee will give favorable consideration to its request for additional funds for this work.

Cordially,

Isador Lubin
Industrial Commissioner