

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

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HELD AT: Committee Room
250 Broadway, 14th Floor

B E F O R E:
ROSIE MENDEZ
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Rosie Mendez
Marie del Carmen Arroyo
Erik Martin Dilan
Melissa Mark-Viverito
Margaret S. Chin
James G. Van Bramer
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A P P E A R A N C E S

Atefeh Riazi
Acting General Manager
NYCHA

Carlos Laboy-Diaz
Deputy General Manager for Operations
NYCHA

Brian Clark
Assistant Deputy General Manager of Operations for
Support Services
NYCHA

Conrad Vazquez
Director of Emergency Service Department
NYCHA

Daniel Squadron
New York State Senator

Nancy Ortiz
Tenant President
Vladeck Houses

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Good morning.

I am Councilwoman Rosie Mendez and I chair the Committee on Public Housing. So first, my apologies for being a little late. I welcome you all today to today's hearing, where we will focus on NYCHA's internal protocols and procedures for responding to and following up on emergency situations, such as December 2010 snowstorm, the August earthquake and Hurricane Irene.

As many of you know, in the aftermath of the 2010 blizzard, the City Council held a number of hearings with the intention of understanding how the city handled its snow removal responsibilities. During these hearings, NYCHA's role in the snowstorm emergency preparedness was raised by Council Members and members of the public. However, a deeper study of the Authority's role in weather emergencies has not yet been undertaken. We hope to begin that analysis today.

We also hope to hear from NYCHA regarding its handling of Hurricane Irene, which arrived in New York this past August. To prepare for the hurricane, NYCHA shut down over 400

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2 elevators and hundreds of boilers and coordinate
3 the evacuation of thousands of residents who
4 resided in the Zone A area, which was the
5 evacuation zone.

6 Although NYCHA's response to both
7 Hurricane Irene and the blizzard provided the
8 public with a glimpse into how the Authority
9 responds to emergency situations, an official
10 account by NYCHA of its procedures and protocols
11 is necessary. As such, at today's hearing I hope
12 the Authority will provide this committee with
13 information on its management of emergency
14 situations.

15 In addition to NYCHA officials,
16 today the Committee will also be hearing from
17 State Senator Daniel Squadron regarding NYCHA's
18 response to weather emergencies in his district,
19 which was affected by the mandatory evacuation
20 during the hurricane.

21 I would like to thank NYCHA
22 representatives, Senator Squadron, residents and
23 advocates for testifying today, and I look forward
24 to a productive hearing.

25 We have been joined by Council

Member Robert Jackson of Manhattan and Council Member Margaret Chin from Manhattan. Just to remind anyone in the public, if you wish to testify, please fill out this little sheet with the sergeant at the back of the room.

Thank you and now I will turn it over to NYCHA. I will just remind you to identify yourself for the record.

ATEFEH RIAZI: Atefeh Riazi, Acting General Manager of NYCHA.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Carlos Laboy-Diaz, Deputy General Manager for Operations.

ATEFEH RIAZI: Good morning Chairwoman Rosie Mendez and distinguished members of the City Council Committee on Public Housing. Thank you for providing us with this opportunity today to discuss the Emergency Preparedness initiatives of the New York City Housing Authority. As I indicated, I am Atefeh Riazi, the Acting General Manager of NYCHA, and I am joined today by Carlos Laboy-Diaz, Deputy General Manager for Operations, and our NYCHA Team.

As you know, NYCHA is a 24/7 operation, and providing its residents with a safe

environment is of paramount importance to us. We are not new to emergency preparations and response, and our staff and procedures are well-honed from years of experience in meeting our residents' needs-whether the emergency is in one apartment, or all of our developments.

Our experience comes from overseeing a city-within-a-city in New York. With our 334 developments with 2,600 buildings and 400,000 residents, NYCHA is the size of cities like Atlanta or Washington, D.C. Some of the events we face may be new, such as the recent earthquake and 9/11, but our reactions and response times are solidly in place.. NYCHA's expertise is a known quantity in the city.

As did many city agencies, NYCHA participated in the Hurricane Irene efforts. In fact 1,500 NYCHA workers performed tasks in shelters to ensure that, first of all New Yorkers are safe, as well as NYCHA and NYCHA residents during the storm. This, while other NYCHA staff were on call to even sleep in development offices at night so that we could-be ready to keep our buildings and equipment safe before, during and

after the hurricane.

In the most recent past, NYCHA also provided assistance during 9/11, and our community centers are routinely used as emergency facilities, including cooling centers during summer heat waves.

So far this year, NYCHA has completed 97,000 emergency work orders, and 98 percent of them were completed within 24 hours. Similar completion responses for elevator outages were at 99 percent. But please allow me to discuss how NYCHA typically responds to an emergency.

Our Emergency Services Department, or ESD, provides management, coordination, and on-the-scene response to emergencies. The type of emergencies NYCHA will respond to include: danger or potential danger to life or limb caused by a maintenance problem, explosions/fires--the Fire Department--must also be notified; gas leaks; passengers stuck in elevators; floods; power failures and apartments without electricity; main sewer and stack stoppages; apartment door and door knobs not working; toilet stoppages; and heat and

hot water complaints. NYCHA responds to all of these emergencies in our developments and other NYCHA structures throughout the five boroughs.

Our Customer Contact Center, CCC, is available for residents to call 24 hours a day, 7-days a week for all maintenance emergencies in their apartment or in a public space. The CCC Customer Service Rep will dispatch staff immediately for emergencies. While the development offices are closed, the CCC will contact the appropriate NYCHA staff or other governmental agencies to make sure emergencies are addressed, but once the situation is stabilized the repairs are referred to the development for follow-up action the next working day.

ESD is responsible for immediately evaluating and coordinating a response to quickly address and abate all after-hours maintenance emergencies. ESD supervisors address and manage heating complaints by directing Borough Heating Staff and coordinating with Borough Management to rectify any problems. The ESD skill trade supervisor will address and manage complaints involving skill trades, call out and direct

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2 necessary skilled trade personnel, and coordinate
3 with skilled trade supervisors. ESD provides
4 follow-up actions if necessary.

5 NYCHA is one of the few City
6 agencies with a 24/7 call operations. This makes
7 us available to respond to emergencies citywide
8 and to mobilize all staff as needed. ESD's
9 Operations Center is located in our Long Island
10 City facility, as well as 11 maintenance team
11 bases, which are strategically located throughout
12 the five boroughs to provide adequate emergency
13 coverage and minimize response time.

14 NYCHA staff is ready to respond to
15 the emergency needs of our residents throughout
16 the Authority. This could be a gas outage, water
17 main break, or water-related incidents, like a
18 snowstorm, hurricane or act of nature, such as an
19 earthquake. As we approach the cold-weather
20 season, or as we have already approached it, the
21 need to respond to heat and gas outages becomes
22 more crucial, and we have protocol in place to
23 deal with such outages as quickly as possible.

24 NYCHA's ability to mobilize 24/7
25 becomes especially critical when addressing large-

1
2 scale, weather-related emergencies such as
3 snowstorms and, as we saw most recently,
4 hurricanes like Irene, which struck in August.

5 As Hurricane Irene approached and
6 eventually hit New York City, NYCHA staff from
7 across the agency, in concert with the Office of
8 Emergency Management and other city agencies,
9 worked hard to mobilize residents. We prepared
10 resident communications in multiple languages; and
11 provided evacuation support in flood zones.

12 NYCHA has 26 developments and more
13 than 45,000 residents, in the most vulnerable
14 area, Zone A, areas like the Rockaways, Coney
15 Island, the Lower East Side and Long Island City.
16 Staff went door-to-door, posted signs and
17 administered automated phone calls in various
18 languages to all area development residents in
19 Zone A alerting them to evacuate.

20 Many NYCHA employees worked around
21 the clock and throughout that weekend to protect
22 lives and property. Part of the success of our
23 efforts, particularly in Far Rockaway where we
24 achieved an 85 percent evacuation rate, was due to
25 the advanced work of ESD, with the leadership and

oversight of Board Member Margarita Lopez, who is also NYCHA's Environmental Coordinator.

Commissioner Lopez recognized very early that the relative remoteness of our six Rockaway developments, and their vulnerability to severe storm damage, with nothing standing between them and the Atlantic Ocean, needed to be addressed early in the storm season.

In April and May of this year, Commissioner Lopez held a series of evening community meetings that were attended by 600 residents. She provided them with the specific information they needed to be aware during any Coastal Storm Warning. This included the necessity of evacuation; planning with families and relatives on where to go; having a go-bag, and remaining alert to all notices.

Once Irene hit, many of these residents were ready to respond to evacuation notices. The storm ultimately was not devastating, but our efforts in mobilizing residents show our ability to get the word out quickly and effectively, thus avoiding potentially disastrous outcomes.

Well ahead of the snow season

If snowfall begins or is predicted during working hours, or at any time during the period on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays, it is understood that staff is expected to be informed and aware of the situation, and to make the necessary arrangements to be ready to begin snow removal.

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2 In the snowstorm that hit New York
3 City last December in 2010 with the record-high
4 snowfall, NYCHA takes pride in having cleared its
5 grounds, including building entrances, sidewalks
6 and private roads within 48-hours. We were also
7 able to assist the City in communities adjacent to
8 NYCHA developments. We work hand-in-hand with
9 City agencies, receiving a considerable amount of
10 salt, sand and snow equipment for snow removal.
11 NYCHA in turn, stands ready to assist the City.

12 When the earth moved on August 23,
13 2011, there were tremors never experienced in 100
14 years in New York. It took several minutes for
15 people to recognize that it was an earthquake that
16 shook most of the middle-Atlantic seaboard, and
17 fortunately, it was short-lived with few injuries.

18 NYCHA took stock of its buildings
19 immediately afterwards. We dispatched teams of
20 engineers to check each and every one of the 2,600
21 buildings for damage. The only structure that
22 appeared to be affected was a chimney at the Red
23 Hook East development. Several bricks fell, but
24 no one was injured. Staff first blocked access.
25 and egress to the front entrance on 8 Dwight

1 Street, until we were sure it was safe. An
2 emergency scaffolding was put in place and
3 engineers examined the structure to begin making
4 repairs. The initial damage caused by the
5 earthquake was repaired; however the existing
6 conditions of the building facade masonry and roof
7 top structures required additional safety
8 measures, such as extending the sidewalk shedding,
9 which NYCHA has implemented.
10

11 Certainly, there can be months and
12 weeks and days to anticipate the potential damage
13 and danger of a coastal Storm or hurricane and to
14 plan accordingly. But there are other large-scale
15 emergencies that impact hundreds of NYCHA
16 residents, sometimes in multiple buildings that
17 are unforeseen. NYCHA's ESD is ready to respond
18 to these events, as well, with an "all hands on
19 deck approach," as we saw in August in Hamilton
20 Heights just before Hurricane Irene.

21 On Friday, August 12, 2011, at
22 approximately 1:40 p.m., a City water main
23 ruptured at the intersection of 152nd Street and
24 Saint Nicholas Avenue. The water main rupture
25 flooded the low pressure gas distribution system

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2 with over 30,000 gallons of water. The flooding
3 caused Con Edison to shut down low pressure gas
4 service to 8,214 customers in the Hamilton Heights
5 and Upper Harlem sections of Manhattan, including
6 three NYCHA properties with a total of 2,714
7 apartments: Rangel Houses; the Polo Grounds Towers
8 and Harlem River II Houses.

9 NYCHA, with the assistance of Con
10 Edison, the New York City Department of
11 Environmental Protection, the Fire Department of
12 New York City, the New York City Police
13 Department, the New York City Department of
14 Transportation, OEM and local elected officials,
15 was able to make initial entries into the area to
16 shut down gas service to the buildings and
17 apartments.

18 Staff from throughout NYCHA were
19 mobilized and rushed equipment and materials to
20 the site. We notified residents of the disruption
21 in service while also distributing hot plates ..
22 NYCHA also delineated the extent of the impact,
23 established a unified command structure through
24 its Incident Command System to manage the
25 response, and disconnected stoves, changed

1
2 appliance valves and capped the gas line in each
3 apartment. This massive mobilization of 380 staff
4 members from 10 different departments led to hot
5 water being restored to all three developments
6 within 24-hours; and 90 percent of all residents
7 also had hot plates in the same 24-hour period.

8 All gas service was restored within
9 3 weeks, which was much earlier than many
10 surrounding private buildings. Of notable
11 assistance in this crisis was a significant
12 change NYCHA made this year to Operations, when it
13 added its 150-member Social Services Unit to this
14 department. Thus, they have become additional
15 partners in our emergency responses.

16 They helped identify special needs
17 residents in the Hamilton Heights outage, as well
18 as our Hurricane Irene efforts and these residents
19 received additional assistance. They are there to
20 provide emotional first aid needed to begin
21 stabilizing the households and aligning the
22 necessary support systems in place aimed at
23 nurturing an improved quality of life for the
24 impacted families. Social Services is a key part
25 of our coordinated and immediate community

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2 response for both staff and residents impacted by
3 a traumatic event. With gas outages, it's
4 important that we gain entry to each and every
5 apartment before we can fix and restore gas
6 service for all.

7 While we are proud of this effort
8 and it shows NYCHA's capacity to mobilize quickly
9 and expansively to respond to an emergency
10 impacting our residents, there is still much to
11 do.

12 As for smaller-scale gas outages,
13 NYCHA successfully negotiated an emergency
14 notification process when at least 9 apartments
15 are affected, which allows us to start work after
16 confirmation from the Department of Buildings that
17 they received our notifications. We typically
18 file the notification upon completion of the
19 asbestos work. We are still required to file for
20 the appropriate permit but we can at least begin
21 repair work during the permitting process instead
22 of having to wait for the permit. In addition, we
23 recently piloted e-filing for the permits, which
24 should help to reduce the time to test, repair and
25 restore services.

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2 In summary, NYCHA realizes that
3 there is more that can be done to improve and
4 enhance our emergency capabilities, and we work on
5 these procedures every day. We also know that we
6 have the staff, the commitment and the experience
7 to be at the top of our game when faced with any
8 crisis. We stand ready, round-the-clock to keep
9 our residents safe and to provide maintenance and
10 repairs sufficient for the security of their
11 environment.

12 With that, I'd like to thank you
13 for asking us to join you for this hearing and
14 would be more than happy to answer any questions
15 the Council may have.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very
17 much. I want to start first with the hurricane
18 because I was, and other Council Members, were at
19 a briefing with some of the top level people from
20 the Mayor's Office when the question of the
21 Housing Authority came up, with its many thousands
22 of residents it seemed that the Mayor's Office
23 didn't have any answers for us. So talk me
24 through, prior to it being declared an emergency,
25 that evacuation was necessary, what coordination

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2 there was with the various agencies, including OEM
3 and the Mayor's top level officials with NYCHA in
4 terms of preparing to evacuate NYCHA residents.

5 ATEFEH RIAZI: Prior to the
6 Hurricane Irene, about two days prior to the
7 emergency being announced by the Mayor, we worked
8 with OEM, providing them our emergency evacuation
9 procedures. We worked with our residents,
10 notifying them, especially our residents that are
11 wheelchair-bound, the seniors, those that are on
12 life support. We worked with the PD to identify
13 them and make sure that the PD knew where they
14 were. As I indicated in my testimony, we put
15 signage up in our buildings and knocked on all the
16 doors--

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
18 Can I take you a little bit back? First, tell me
19 all the agencies within the city that NYCHA was
20 dealing with or that had reached out to NYCHA.
21 Can you just list those agencies?

22 ATEFEH RIAZI: Agencies prior to
23 the hurricane hitting New York, right?

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Prior to a
25 state of emergency being declared.

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2 ATEFEH RIAZI: And a state of
3 emergency.

4 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: For the record,
5 Carlos Laboy-Diaz, Deputy General Manager of
6 Operations. I cannot name all the agencies, but
7 we're part of the OEM desk coordinator. We are
8 there at the location and with all those city
9 agencies, and we will coordinate with any agency
10 as needed. We are more than glad to give you the
11 list but we have presence at OEM.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So just to
13 clarify for the public, I've taken a tour of the
14 OEM command center. So there are reps from every
15 different city agency.

16 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: That's correct.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So NYCHA has a
18 rep there at all times.

19 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yes, ma'am.
20 Yes, we do.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

22 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: That's part of
23 the preparation for any major emergency in which
24 we have our representative there. As long as
25 they're open, we're going to have somebody there

24/7.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So let me ask you this, because my recollection and the information provided to me was that at the time of the blizzard there was no NYCHA rep at that OEM command center. Is that correct?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: They usually request our presence when they feel it is part of the need in that particular emergency. At that particular time, our presence was not requested.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's right. Because they didn't consider it an emergency, because the snow was just coming down. Okay, so that was on them, not on you. So there was no one there during the blizzard, but since the blizzard you always have someone there staffed at the OEM.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Let's go a little back in history. Every time that we have a major emergency that they need our presence, we form part of the OEM emergency response team. However, when it's a weather emergency, they have these conference calls, you know, every hour or whatever time they need it, and we participate on those conference calls in terms of preparation,

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2 for a weather emergency. Even our communication
3 system, our radios are connected to OEM, and if
4 it's needed, they will locate us and call us for
5 support or to be part of whatever planning they're
6 doing.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Let me just
8 ask, because while I was not in office and maybe
9 also--first, a little housekeeping. We've been
10 joined by Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito
11 from Manhattan, Council Member Daniel Halloran
12 from Queens. We were momentarily joined by
13 Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo from the
14 Bronx, who will be coming back. She's in another
15 meeting.

16 Probably also Council Member Chin
17 and I can speak about 9/11. We were not elected
18 to office, but we lived in the neighborhood. When
19 9/11 happened, I know particularly a lot of the
20 residents of public housing lost their elevator
21 service and some water. That was, at that time,
22 when I became very familiar with your Social
23 Services department, and it was a critical part
24 for us and the work that your department did was
25 incredible in terms of when we identified

1
2 individuals who saw the towers come down, actually
3 go into their apartments and giving them
4 counseling on the spot, and referrals and any
5 other counseling as needed. That was crucial.

6 When 9/11 happened, and it wasn't
7 expected, what kind of emergency protocol was put
8 in place for this kind of situation, a manmade
9 caused event that could have a big effect on the
10 residents of public housing?

11 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I wasn't here
12 for 9/11. I'm going to ask if any of my staff
13 members can answer that question.

14 BRIAN CLARK: Good morning. Brian
15 Clark [phonetic], Assistant Deputy General Manager
16 of Operations for Support Services.

17 So, of course, that was an
18 incredibly catastrophic situation. We were
19 contacted immediately by the city and were asked
20 to provide materials and equipment to support. I
21 don't know if you recall, but you probably saw a
22 lot of the NYCHA dump trucks actually lined up
23 down here to assist the city in carting away
24 debris, as well as we put together all of our
25 personal protective equipment that was needed for

1 the staff down here. That was also distributed.
2 So with an event like that, the city coordinates,
3 you know through OEM, reaches out to all the
4 agencies for resources. As our general manager
5 said, we're a city within a city and we do have a
6 lot of resources. Certainly, in that situation,
7 we were tapped into with the initial response
8

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Did 9/11
10 change any NYCHA protocols or procedures at that
11 time?

12 BRIAN CLARK: Absolutely. It
13 changed everything, certainly for our emergency
14 response program and certainly for the city.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you give
16 me a specific example?

17 BRIAN CLARK: Sure. Review of
18 radio operation and coordination, you know making
19 sure that we had the right folks with radios and
20 that the radios were functioning. That was
21 certainly an issue because the cell towers were
22 lost.

23 Thank you, Conrad. Our business
24 continuity plan, since our data centers down here
25 were impacted, so we had to review our business

1
2 continuity plan and make changes based on that,
3 with actually one of our backup areas now I think
4 is in Sherwood Forest, I think, the facility
5 there.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I know that my
7 colleague Robert Jackson has to leave, so I'm
8 going to allow him to ask some questions, and then
9 any other Council Members, and then I'll ask some
10 questions at the end.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you,
12 Council Member, I appreciate that. I just wanted
13 to comment on the water main break in the Hamilton
14 Heights, the Harlem area, which the main break was
15 in my district. Even though the NYCHA
16 developments that I represent, Grant Houses,
17 Manhattanville Houses, the Drew-Hamilton Houses,
18 Audubon House and a couple others in northern
19 Manhattan were not impacted by the water main
20 break.

21 My involvement on the scene at
22 briefings of the various agencies and departments
23 that were there, I wanted to compliment to the
24 extent of my knowledge the way NYCHA coordinated
25 their activities in addressing the gas outages at

1 various houses in which the water main impacted.

2 In my opinion, based on everything
3 that was given at the briefings and what I know,
4 that you acted quickly, responsibly and did what
5 you were supposed to do. Obviously, that's what
6 we expect, but it's important to know that
7 especially during times as members of legislative
8 bodies we criticize for not doing enough. In my
9 opinion, I thought that you acted very well and
10 you need to be complimented on that, you and all
11 of the staff involved.
12

13 Even though my colleague Inez
14 Dickens represents the Rangel Houses, the Harlem
15 River Houses and the Polo Grounds. So I wanted to
16 say that. But also I know that during the storm,
17 the hurricane, I reached out to several of my
18 leaders at Grant, Drew and Manhattanville to ask
19 them whether or not they were all right, whether
20 or not things were in place, and they had
21 communicated with me that they were in contact
22 with NYCHA's management there and everything was
23 fine. Obviously, the developments that I
24 represent were not negatively impacted.

25 But again, I think that you did

1
2 your job, as far as I am concerned, in making sure
3 that the resident and resident leaders were in
4 tune and informed about what, if anything, should
5 occur. That's very, very important.

6 Just finally, I just wanted to say
7 in general with respects to the hurricane and the
8 evacuation of thousands and thousands of
9 residents, both in public housing and elsewhere, I
10 thought that was a pre-test for the City of New
11 York in dealing with any emergency, obviously,
12 that comes forward in the future. That was a test
13 for all of us and hopefully we will learn and be
14 more prepared overall in dealing with such
15 emergencies in the future.

16 Madame Chair, I just want to thank
17 you for giving me the opportunity to say those few
18 words.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very
20 much. Do you have any questions for the Housing
21 Authority? No? Okay, Council Member Chin?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you,
23 Madame Chair. First of all, I want to thank you,
24 NYCHA, for coming and for your work really around
25 the hurricane. I think that was pretty much as

1 Council Member Jackson said. It's a wakeup call
2 for all of us, like how do you prepare for
3 emergencies. I just think back to what happened
4 down here in Smith Houses and how the resident
5 leaders and the resident and with all the elected
6 official and all the staff and volunteers to put
7 together such an operation.
8

9 So have you sum up from that
10 incident in terms of what kind of protocol could
11 you put in place in response to this kind of
12 emergency down the road, in terms of like alerting
13 the tenants and utilizing local media and also
14 working with elected officials and community
15 organizations to mobilize volunteers to help?

16 ATEFEH RIAZI: Absolutely. We have
17 gone back and revised our procedures. The
18 hurricane was a great lessons learned. We thought
19 we had perfect procedures but we realized that it
20 needed a lot of enhancements. We believe we have
21 a great process right now. The partnership with
22 the elected and with our partners was tremendous.
23 I want to personally thank you because we reached
24 out to many of you, asking you to come and ask
25 residents to evacuate. That meant a great deal to

1
2 us.

3 We've learned that we have to make
4 sure all of our communications is in different
5 languages. We did use some of the local
6 broadcasting and some of the local TV, but we
7 should have done it earlier versus later, to make
8 sure that we reached out to all of our residents
9 who speak different languages. So we have really
10 enhanced that.

11 Partnership with various city
12 agencies is another area that we have discussed
13 internally and with the Mayor, around
14 transportation, evacuations, around shelters. We
15 are strengthening our procedures. We've learned a
16 lot and we will certainly mobilize as fast as we
17 did during Irene and we would begin our
18 communications much, much earlier.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Have you
20 thought about how to sort of use the modern
21 technology to notify residents?

22 ATEFEH RIAZI: We are. As we reach
23 out to our residents, we're trying to get their
24 cell phones, their email addresses and we do like
25 to reach out to them, or at least if not them

1 personally, their children. It's really important
2 to us, not only around a disaster but also around
3 basic elevator outages, gas outages. So it's part
4 of our mission and we expect over the next two
5 years as we collect their cell phone numbers and
6 their email addresses and we get them to use
7 social media more, through Twitter--we actually
8 communicate through Twitter and Facebook--but we
9 like to make sure that they would use it as well.

11 We actually have two vans which are
12 going to start very soon. These are digital vans
13 and the vans will go to our developments, teaching
14 our residents how to use the web, how to login to
15 various sites. That's a part of an effort to
16 close the digital divide and train and get our
17 residents to work with us online versus through
18 pieces of paper or through phone calls.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So in terms
20 of all of your developments, do you have like an
21 assessment in terms of the language need in each
22 development and also all the seniors and people
23 with disabilities? So you have a record of all
24 the demographics?

25 ATEFEH RIAZI: Yes, we do. We have

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2 a list of all of our seniors, wheelchair-bound
3 residents, we have a list of those that are on
4 life support. In case of electricity outages
5 they're the ones we get to first. We update that
6 list regularly. We share it with the PD and the
7 Fire Department. We keep a close eye of them.

8 We also understand and know the
9 languages that are spoken at various developments.
10 We have special outreach to them in their language
11 as emergencies come up or drills take place.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I was glad to
13 hear that you incorporated the Social Service
14 department under operations. Is that in your
15 testimony that you--

16 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [interposing]
17 Yes, we did. That's one of the changes that the
18 board and the general manager is doing in terms of
19 support for our residents. Operations have daily
20 contact with our tenants. That's part of the
21 emergency process that we provide the Police and
22 other agencies the list of families with some kind
23 of handicap or accessibility problem that needed
24 to be contacted, and we were knocking at those
25 doors first. I remember that Saturday, I think it

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2 was Senator Squadron and the chairman was visiting
3 and talking to family members because we have some
4 tenants they could not move and we wanted to help
5 them move. Some of these tenants made the
6 decision not to move. We talked to them
7 personally. We were knocking door by door. We
8 still do have a culture or a language program
9 sometimes and the help of presidents like Ms.
10 Ortiz in Smith Houses was crucial for us to do
11 this massive mobilization.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: You're
13 talking Aixa Torres.

14 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yes. I'm
15 sorry.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: At Smith.
17 Ms. Ortiz is Atlantic.

18 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I'm sorry.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: That was a
20 tremendous effort. And I think the different
21 language, like in Chinese it was different
22 dialects.

23 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yeah.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So I was glad
25 that my staff was able to help with Fijianese and

1
2 Taishanese [phonetic], which people don't
3 recognize, it's also the different dialects that
4 Chinese community speaks.

5 Just one other question on the
6 smaller emergency, the gas outage. I mean like in
7 Smith Houses, in one of the developments in my
8 district, it's a constant problem. I know that in
9 your testimony you're looking at how to coordinate
10 those smaller emergencies. To us, those are
11 emergencies that really are hurting families
12 because all of the sudden they come home and they
13 have no gas for a long time.

14 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We're very
15 aware of that. As part of the work order task
16 force, we're handling more emergencies and doing
17 more preventive maintenance. This year we have
18 closed, as of today, like 70,000 more work orders
19 than previous year. Obviously that has a cost. I
20 mean, you know, an increase in overtime. We're in
21 the process of hiring additional plumber.

22 Specifically about Smith Houses,
23 hopefully we have schedule Con Ed, who were there
24 this afternoon to work with that particular
25 building. In a property like Smith Houses, our

1
2 cost estimates indicate that in order for us to
3 complete repairs or to change the lines in the
4 other ten buildings, it will cost about \$1.6
5 million to do that.

6 As I believe the general manager
7 was mentioning before, we're in the process of
8 doing what we call the physical need assessments
9 to address some of these issues. As you also
10 know, we go back to our capital needs that the
11 chairman and other board members has expressed to
12 this body.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I think part
14 of it, on this committee, I think it would be good
15 for us to really know the capital needs,
16 particularly developments in each of our
17 districts, so we can help advocate and work with
18 you to make sure that we could take care of these
19 problems. I mean down the road, yes, you have to
20 fix the infrastructure to prevent these kind of
21 emergencies, but we've just got to do it. So we
22 need to know what the needs are. I think we're
23 willing to work with you.

24 Also, with these kind of
25 emergencies, how can we help you in terms of the

1
2 coordination with the different agencies, with Con
3 Ed so that we can also get them to be more aware
4 that in this kind of situation if they can help
5 us, we can speed up the process of getting these
6 gas outages fixed. I'm willing to work with you.
7 I'm sure our committee also to make sure that
8 these kind of emergencies are taken care of as
9 quickly as possible.

10 ATEFEH RIAZI: We appreciate that
11 very much. As Carlos mentioned, it's a very
12 complex process and time consuming because we have
13 to go to our sister agencies for permits. We have
14 to go to the utility providers to certify that we
15 have tested everything correctly. They have to do
16 it before and after. We have to knock on every
17 door, replace the valve in every apartment. We
18 have to replace those in the top floors. When we
19 do the tests, everybody has to be home so we can
20 test it and go apartment by apartment.

21 So we appreciate your support in
22 terms of the funding because funding is a big
23 issue. If we can do replacement of these risers,
24 especially at Smith which we need about \$1.6
25 million, but throughout NYCHA. We certainly are

1
2 hurting on the capital side. If we could fix it,
3 it happens a lot less. So we have to fix, you
4 know we have to fix less risers and a lot less
5 residents would be out of gas.. so it is on top of
6 my priorities, I know the top of Carlos'
7 priorities to come with some innovative ways,
8 working with our partners to shorten the time that
9 our residents get impacted.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you.

11 Thank you, Madame Chair.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
13 Daniel Halloran?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Thank
15 you, Madame Chair. Just a brief group of
16 questions regarding your interagency connection.
17 Looking back at the hurricane in particular, I
18 notice that you indicate that there were 45,000
19 residents in 26 developments in Zone A. I'm
20 curious as to how NYCHA relates to the OEM office
21 operations because I don't see that you have a
22 seat at the table at OEM. You do? Okay, you do.

23 How do you guys relay between your
24 OEM rep and I guess it's the call center that's
25 your command center. You have the emergency

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command center--

ATEFEH RIAZI: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: So how
does that work?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We have a very
close relationship. Once they open OEM, we have
presence and everything is coordinated from every
agency through our representative there. We also
have our internal command center which is in Long
Island City in which all the staff kind of run a
similar operation to what OEM does. That means
that even before they open OEM, we participate in
all the preparatory calls. If it's weather
related, we usually have every hour or every two
or three hours, calls in which we have our top
level staff, our director of emergency services
participating on that and he keeps all the staff
informed. We all have radios that have connection
to OEM. That was one of the reasons for the
success through the storm, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Just in
relationship to the Zone A facility, is there a
specific deployment plan for those NYCHA
facilities, given that they're permanently

1
2 considered vulnerable in terms of their proximity
3 to the coastline and their placement in a flood
4 zone itself? Are there specific protocols for
5 them as opposed to the rest of the housing? Is
6 that actually disseminated to the residents as
7 well or is that just known by like the
8 administration and staff at those facilities?

9 ATEFEH RIAZI: That's a great
10 question. As I mentioned in my testimony, when
11 you look at the six developments we have in
12 Rockaways, which are in serious flood zone, we
13 actually have drills and we've trained the
14 residents to make sure that they know what to do
15 in case of an emergency. We run through those
16 drills with them.

17 So the buildings which are--and
18 again Rockaways is our number one priority, Smith
19 Houses certainly because it gets flooded often.
20 So these buildings we have a different maintenance
21 process. We keep an eye when we have a lot of
22 rain, large rainfall because generally the
23 basement gets flooded, the boilers get flooded,
24 elevators gets lots of water on them and they stop
25 working. So those are on top of our list at least

1
2 in terms of rain and flooding and we have specific
3 procedures to make sure we respond to them.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Just
5 finally, in regards to that, it was interesting
6 today--I don't know if you heard that Columbia
7 University issued a report on the rising sea
8 levels around the City of New York, and
9 particularly they said within the next 70 years,
10 they anticipate a four-foot rise in sea levels.
11 That would create a significant change obviously
12 in our flood plans. Obviously that's still a
13 little ways off, but those particular facilities
14 you identified in Zone A, I guess going forward
15 its something that we should be mindful of in
16 terms of how you're approaching further
17 construction and I guess ultimately battening down
18 the hatches, as they say, in those facilities in
19 particular. Yes?

20 ATEFEH RIAZI: Absolutely. I
21 haven't read the report, but I would certainly
22 look at it. We have to discuss what we'll do in
23 terms of our capital investment plan and capital
24 renovation plan. I'm sure the problem we have is
25 a problem that the city will have, right, the loss

1
2 of developments in these zones, and we'll partner
3 with them to see what plans they have regarding
4 those developments. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you,
6 Council Member Halloran. We've been joined by
7 Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer from Queens, and
8 he has some questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank
10 you very much, Madame Chair. Thank you. I want
11 to talk about a couple of things. It was at the
12 City Council hearings on the blizzard response
13 that I asked the former deputy mayor if NYCHA had
14 been involved at the OEM emergency center
15 regarding the blizzard, the impending blizzard.
16 He said no, that NYCHA was not a part of that
17 response, which shocked a lot of us and I think
18 led to us calling on NYCHA to be involved in any
19 emergency preparedness. NYCHA was involved in the
20 response to the hurricane, right, and leading up
21 to in advance of the hurricane. Has that been
22 codified at all, so that we know that any time the
23 emergency center is activated that NYCHA now will
24 always be a part of that?

25 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We participate

1 of every call when it's weather related, even if
2 they don't call us to be part of the OEM staff,
3 because they call what agencies they need at a
4 particular time. Because we're landlords, we have
5 to activate our own internal plan. We coordinate
6 with OEM all the time. And our plan for snow,
7 hurricane, it will move forward. I don't have a
8 specific answer if they have to call for every
9 emergency. But the city will activate that part
10 of our plan if needed.
11

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: But
13 your sense is that you will always be--

14 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [interposing]
15 Yeah.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --a
17 part of the--

18 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [interposing]
19 We're always part, yeah.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Well,
21 you weren't during the blizzard, unfortunately,
22 but that was a failure on the part of the city.
23 With respect to the hurricane, there's a lot of
24 attention, and Councilman Halloran raised a good
25 point. It was on one of those conference calls

1
2 leading up to the hurricane that I asked the city
3 about its plans for Queensbridge and Ravenswood,
4 which are in my district. They were not in Zone
5 A, but they were, in the case of one of them,
6 right across the street from Zone A.

7 Regardless, piggybacking on
8 Councilman Halloran's statement just before about
9 water levels rising. It was pretty clear that
10 there needs to be a plan for Queensbridge and
11 Ravenswood, which Queensbridge is the largest
12 housing development that we have. I certainly
13 wasn't happy with the response that the city gave
14 to us. I think we pushed hard and I think we got
15 some movement. Clearly, there was a great deal of
16 focus, rightfully so, on the Rockaways and other
17 places.

18 I'm wondering what is your plan for
19 Queensbridge and Ravenswood as it relates to those
20 kinds of storms, because let me just say at the
21 time the plan was to bring everyone to the
22 evacuation center at Newcomers High School, the
23 former Long Island City High School. And
24 obviously, the population of Queensbridge far
25 outpaces the capacity at Long Island City High

1 School.

2
3 So I'm wondering if we ever needed
4 to, God forbid, evacuate Queensbridge and
5 Ravenswood, what is the real plan for bringing
6 them safely to a safe location? Because at the
7 time I argued trying to get everyone to Long
8 Island City High School was probably not going to
9 be feasible in and of itself.

10 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: It is two parts
11 to your question. In terms of the Housing
12 Authority response, we had all our employees were
13 activated and every property, Zone A, Zone B, we
14 had staff at locations in case that was needed.
15 That was one of the properties I remember we
16 discussed. And if the city called for the
17 evacuation, we will follow, because we identify
18 all the residents with special needs. We were
19 ready to do whatever the city asked us to do.

20 From that perspective, we have
21 staff at the time there. We have staff after the
22 fact, trying to reestablish the elevators in those
23 buildings that we have problems with the water.
24 We're always going to be ready, like the general
25 manager mentioned in her presentation. We

1 activated citywide.

2 I mean we're talking today maybe at
3 some particular properties but we have staff
4 because it wasn't only about water, it was about
5 the wind damage. We had some trees that we needed
6 to cut and make sidewalks clear and things like
7 that. That means that in our plan we cover all
8 our properties.

9 I remember the discussion about
10 your properties and a couple others that were
11 really close to Zone A and the instruction was we
12 were kind of standby. If the call was made, we
13 already have staff there and ready to do the same
14 thing that we were doing in Zone A.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So can
16 I just ask a follow up? So in terms of
17 Queensbridge, let's just say, have you done that
18 work? I realize some of this is the city's
19 responsibility and some of it is NYCHA. Do we
20 know how many buses, for example, it would take to
21 evacuate Queensbridge? Is there a plan like that
22 where we already know, okay, this is how many
23 folks we would need to evacuate, this is how many
24 buses it would take and this is where we would
25

1 attempt to take the good folks at Queensbridge?
2 Has that kind of thought, is there that kind of
3 planning? Do we know how many buses, for example,
4 we might need?
5

6 ATEFEH RIAZI: If I may take that
7 question. The evacuation policy and procedure is
8 really handled by the city or the PD, not by
9 NYCHA. Although, we assist the city, and we did a
10 great deal of work during the evacuation. We
11 participated actively in evacuating our residents.
12 And we had a 90 percent success rate at Smith
13 Houses because we got the support of the Council
14 Member, we had the support of the resident and in
15 Rockaways. But this is the responsibility of
16 other city agencies.

17 We are partnering with them. We
18 take guidance from them. But we could go back and
19 understand what their recommendations are around
20 our developments and get back to you with an
21 answer.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Sure.
23 I understand that you're saying that it's really
24 their responsibility. I would just argue that as
25 the landlord, as you said, of the good folks at

1
2 Queensbridge, I would want to know, God forbid in
3 the event of an emergency, that the city had a
4 plan and that they knew exactly how they were
5 going to get folks to safety in a way that made
6 sense and not simply rely on the fact that we
7 trust them to come up with a plan.

8 I would urge all of us to make sure
9 that we know what the plan is, as water levels
10 rise, as seemingly we have more extreme weather
11 and Queensbridge is right there. As you may or
12 may not know, the seawall at Queensbridge Park,
13 which is certainly not your responsibility, but
14 part of that seawall collapsed in the hurricane.
15 So there are reasonable concerns.

16 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I want to
17 assure you and all the City Council members that
18 during that storm, everything that we needed, we
19 would ask the city and it was done in seconds. We
20 have identified the tenants with the special needs
21 and when we asked for transportation for the
22 tenants with special needs, the transportation was
23 there.

24 This is my fifth hurricane. I was
25 born and raised in an island. We've been doing

1
2 that for a while. I must say that I was very
3 impressed with the fact that we just needed to
4 call whoever it was at OEM, "I need five cars in
5 this particular address" and they're on their way.
6 From that point of view, I will tell you that OEM
7 coordination did work for us.

8 Like the general manager said, we
9 needed Police because people were--the truth is
10 people wasn't listening to us. We put notices two
11 days before. It's not until we engaged City
12 Council Members, the Police and other people that
13 they really came down. From the preparation part,
14 we have identified who needs to be transported,
15 again some kind of special needs. We can assure
16 you that at least from this past experience,
17 everything that we needed. We have a conference
18 call at 2:00 in the morning trying to--City Hall,
19 OEM to be sure that we were all in sync. We were
20 short with volunteers and we have a Fire
21 Department and a police officer at 2:00 that
22 Saturday morning in our offices here coordinating
23 what they will do and what we will do. I cannot
24 ask for anything better.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Sure.

1
2 I appreciate that. I want to say publicly,
3 because I did so privately, Deputy Mayor Wilson
4 and Matt Gordon in particular at the Mayor's
5 Office were extremely responsive during the storm
6 and they were tremendous with myself. So that was
7 not the issue.

8 I look forward to you getting back
9 to us about answering some of those questions,
10 such as how many buses would it take if we needed
11 to evacuate Queensbridge and Ravenswood, and
12 things like that which I think we should know.
13 I'm not arguing about the city's response to the
14 hurricane, which was great, but more of our
15 internal plans should we have to ever evacuate a
16 place as large as Queensbridge and nearby
17 Ravenswood.

18 So I have other questions but I
19 will throw it back to the chair and cede the floor
20 for now. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you,
22 Council Member. I'm going to ask a series of
23 questions and interject some commentary.

24 So, for example, for the blizzard,
25 you know I believe, at least in my developments,

1
2 the response of NYCHA was phenomenal. I walked my
3 developments and the pathways were cleared. As a
4 matter of fact, the only problems I encountered is
5 when Department of Sanitation was plowing the
6 streets. They'd plow up the crosswalks that NYCHA
7 had already shoveled. So I want to thank the
8 Authority.

9 And just ask when the blizzard
10 happened, you have people in your development or
11 you have people who live elsewhere who work at
12 developments far away. How did you deploy your
13 workers in those instances?

14 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Similar to what
15 we did with Hurricane Irene, we have half of the
16 staff work a number of hours, the other half will
17 work the other number of hours. It depends on the
18 severity. I wasn't here in the snow, but I
19 remember for the hurricane, when we thought
20 something will happen, we wanted 50 percent of the
21 staff. When we saw that the incident will be
22 bigger, we mobilized more staff. This is a moment
23 by moment decision. But we have a plan in which
24 we have staff to spend the night if we feel that
25 it's going to be difficult. During the storm, I

1
2 believe they have staff that was spending the
3 night at some of the developments, depending on
4 the particular situation.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So for example
6 at the hurricane, the city shut down the mass
7 transit system. Did you ask your workers to go to
8 the development that they may have been assigned
9 to or did they go to a neighboring development if
10 they couldn't travel to their development that
11 their assigned to?

12 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We have
13 different options. We canvass our staff. If you
14 live in a development that's part of the plan, you
15 also have vehicles, that we have our vehicles and
16 for that we make an exception. If we need to
17 mobilize some staff, they will move around
18 depending of where they're needed.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In situations,
20 I don't know about the hurricane, but like in the
21 blizzard, do you hire temporary help?

22 ATEFEH RIAZI: I can take that
23 while Brian is coming. We actually got a lot of
24 contractors to help us, especially with tree
25 trimming. Around the gas out, we had contractors

1
2 help us. So we do have emergency contracts that
3 we can immediately call upon and use in case our
4 staff is not sufficient. Brian, do you want to
5 add to that?

6 BRIAN CLARK: Sure. We have the
7 ability to hire temporary staff. In the case of
8 the blizzard and actually there were a few snow
9 events last winter, it wasn't required for us to
10 hire temporary staff, but we have the ability to
11 do that.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. I
13 want to go back to 9/11. So the year, in 2002, a
14 year after 9/11, there was a transformer fire at
15 Con Edison, which is bordered by Jacob Riis
16 Houses, Campos Plaza, a Mitchell-Lama Development,
17 Village East and a predecessor to the Mitchell-
18 Lama program, Haven Plaza, that's a rental HDFC
19 owned by the Archdiocese. When that transformer
20 fire happened, the buildings in that area had to
21 be evacuated. Not all of Jacob Riis, but all of
22 the ones that bordered Con Edison.

23 I was actually in Albany, but I got
24 all the phone calls. I worked for the
25 councilwoman at the time. The reports I was

1
2 getting is that the evacuation of the Mitchell-
3 Lama and of Haven Plaza happened more coordinated
4 or smoothly than they did at Jacob Riis. We also
5 know residents won't always evacuate, and so it
6 wasn't until the Fire Department was knocking on
7 all the doors and the smoke was really coming
8 heavily into the development that we got them
9 evacuated.

10 But since this was a year after
11 9/11, does NYCHA and we in the city have any kind
12 of protocol for emergency evacuations that are
13 near those kind of sites that may cause a problem?
14 Like in Queensbridge where there is this
15 collapsing seawall?

16 BRIAN CLARK: I'm a bit older than
17 Conrad. My memory isn't as good, so I'm going to
18 refer to Conrad Vazquez, our emergency services
19 director.

20 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: Good morning.
21 Conrad Vazquez, director of Emergency Service
22 Department. I believe I remember it was a
23 Saturday, if I'm not mistaken.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yeah.

25 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: We were at some of

1
2 our family days, I believe we were in Staten
3 Island when we got the call. I remember because
4 we had to take our command bus out there in order
5 for the residents to know that we were at the
6 location and to be able to funnel the information
7 that was being given to us at the time by the
8 Police Department, OEM and the Fire Department.

9 When we got the call, the residents
10 had already been instructed. Some residents, it
11 wasn't all, had been instructed to evacuate. That
12 was something that was handled by FD. I don't
13 recall too much on the specifics of whether they
14 did come out or they didn't. You probably have a
15 little bit more information on that because we
16 arrived after the fact.

17 Since then we require all of our
18 developments to have at least two locations in
19 case and evacuation is needed for any particular
20 building. For the most part it's either the
21 community center, but we require one outside the
22 community center that the staff checks on every
23 year during our Emergency Preparedness Day. What
24 we do is we like for the staff to rally at either
25 one of the two evac points, one being on the

1 location, which is usually the community center,
2 as I said, and one outside, in front of a school,
3 if there's a school in the area, or another place
4 hopefully owned by the city.
5

6 It is required for all of our
7 locations not just specifically to those
8 communities. I hope that answers it.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes. That is
10 very helpful. Robert Jackson, when he was here,
11 mentioned how he contacted some of the tenant
12 association leaders. Certainly in the Lower East
13 Side during the hurricane it was a coordinated
14 effort between the elected officials and Senator
15 Squadron, who is here, who will be testifying
16 shortly, Council Member Chin and myself, the
17 leaders in the development and NYCHA. I want to
18 give special thanks to Brian Honan [phonetic], who
19 was phenomenal, Natalie Rivers [phonetic] and
20 Commissioner Lopez, who was always on hand to work
21 with us to evacuate residents, particularly the
22 elderly and individuals in wheelchairs.

23 You did mention people knocked on
24 doors. Can you talk to us a little bit about
25 that? You mentioned there were notices in

1
2 different languages. Can you tell us how many
3 languages and which languages the notices were
4 made available in?

5 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I remember
6 Chinese, I remember Spanish, English. We have
7 also our call center maybe making what is called
8 robo calls. We started three days before. When
9 we knew that the storm was coming, we put a notice
10 to our tenants, you know pay attention to the
11 news, don't pay attention to rumors.

12 It was kind of getting escalated,
13 right. It got to a point in which then Saturday
14 we needed to do the evacuation. I think it was
15 Friday night maybe that we contacted, sometime
16 Friday we were contacting the elected officials
17 when we realized that the tenants were not kind of
18 listening to us, right. We can go half of the way
19 but they need to also some responsibility. We
20 were coordinated with OEM. I remember all this,
21 like two or three hours calls, every two or three
22 hours, and getting the latest weather reports.

23 ATEFEH RIAZI: So part of the
24 problem was that it was sunny until about say
25 4:00, right? So we were all out and we were all

1
2 knocking on doors and asking people to leave and
3 get ready and the buses were empty. We had a lot
4 of buses for them to get on. Then as they started
5 to see the rain come down, we saw a lot of people
6 get into their own cars and go stay with family.
7 I mean what we have taught them and told them and
8 trained them is go stay with family first. It's
9 where you want to go. The second option is to go
10 to shelters.

11 So what helped also that day was
12 that the PD actually conducted verticals for us.
13 And they went and started knocking on the doors
14 and then we reached out to our electeds and your
15 help was tremendous. Because when your staff and
16 when you and your staff called upon them and we
17 started going to developments, they took it
18 seriously.

19 When you look at evacuation rates
20 in NYCHA developments versus the rest of the city,
21 we had the highest percentage of evacuations.
22 Eighty-five percent in Rockaways, 90 percent at
23 Smith Houses.

24 So that coordination was really
25 helpful. We certainly have to reach out, as I

1
2 said earlier, with different languages, different
3 media, to make sure we talk to residents.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
5 Can you tell me a little bit about how NYCHA
6 coordinates with state and federal agencies and
7 which ones your coordinate with?

8 ATEFEH RIAZI: Around emergency
9 preparations or just in general?

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Around weather
11 related and non-weather related emergencies.

12 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: As part of OEM
13 we deal with the FEMA representative and the State
14 Office of Emergency Management. Right now, for
15 example, as part of the process for our claims and
16 reimbursement, we have our own staff member as a
17 representative to these committees. You want to
18 elaborate a little more on that?

19 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: Especially during
20 the weather related incidents, the National
21 Weather Service is on each of the conference
22 calls, all the agency conference calls that we
23 participate in. They're actually the first to
24 speak on what's happening, just so we're updated
25 and we take preparations based on their current

1 forecast.

2
3 We mentioned that SEMO is a large
4 part of when we meet with the Mayor's Office of
5 Emergency Management. FEMA is a little bit later
6 on. You know, they're usually the aftermath, but
7 they do participate in any of the conference
8 calls. We work very closely with the Department
9 of Environmental Protection with the weather
10 related issues. The New York Police Department,
11 the Housing Wheel, we are almost on an hour basis
12 call between Chief Jaffe's office, myself, Mr.
13 Clark, depending on the situation at hand.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. As
15 Council Member Chin mentioned earlier about
16 coordinating with us and other elected officials
17 around capital needs. So in 2006, I was in some
18 of my developments which we designating cooling
19 sites. There was a heat wave. And I walked in
20 and while it was better than outside, it wasn't
21 much better. Part of it was because there was a
22 lot of people in there. It was a senior center
23 and so all the seniors did go to the cooling
24 center.

25 As a result, myself and the borough

1
2 president have put capital funding to renovate
3 that cooling center. Have you done an assessment
4 of designating cooling centers in NYCHA facilities
5 and where they're located, what kind of capital
6 needs there are? I would certainly as the head of
7 this committee like to see that.

8 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: What we normally
9 do is at the beginning of the heating season, we
10 meet with community operations entity of the
11 Housing Authority to go over all the locations
12 that can possibly be used as cooling centers.
13 Sometimes, as you know, OEM won't ask for us to
14 open all of them. They have DFTA and other of our
15 sister agencies to participate.

16 We make an assessment at the
17 beginning of that season. I can't say whether or
18 not at this point--we can get back to you on
19 whether we're looking into any capital needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes. Well, I
21 think you should do that because if you look at it
22 at the beginning of the season, sometimes the way
23 the weather has been all of the sudden we have an
24 emergency, it's hitting 100 and something degrees.
25 And as long as it takes capital money to be

1 allocated and used by some agencies. It certainly
2 would be good to know what those needs are ahead
3 of time so that we can, particularly during your
4 financial crunch, provide you with capital dollars
5 for that.
6

7 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: Will do.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Thank
9 you. Can you tell me how your protocols are in
10 line with or different from OEM protocols?

11 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: We, like all other
12 city agencies, take the lead from OEM. We
13 participate in all their training. We participate
14 in all their calls regarding any and all
15 emergencies. We're part of the human services
16 aspect of OEM. So we try to, as closely as
17 possible, mimic their procedures, especially now
18 that we have the continuity of operations plan
19 that the Mayor requested of all the city agencies.
20 We have our plan in. It's a pretty robust plan.
21 It's what that demands is that we all are on the
22 same page when it comes to emergency response.
23 They have basically what we consider the
24 procedures that we need to make sure that every
25 day, even though there's an emergency in place,

1
2 that we continue to provide the services that we
3 have to our residents and that goes in line with
4 the plan that is demanded by City Hall.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So does OEM
6 review your procedures--

7 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: [interposing] Oh
8 yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --and can they
10 override any of your procedures?

11 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: They don't tend to
12 override, but they'll basically tell us what they
13 perceive of the need, and of course we take
14 everything they have and try to relate our plans
15 to it.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: How often does
17 that happen?

18 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: The plan is a
19 living document, if you will. It's constantly
20 being reviewed by internal department as well as
21 OEM. We meet with them, I guess, I would say more
22 than quarterly, when it comes to the plan.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I'm assuming
24 there are times where OEM may have a certain
25 protocol that doesn't fit for NYCHA because of the

1
2 diversity of your housing stock, and in those
3 cases you use your judgment about whether you use
4 OEM protocol or whether you use your own?

5 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: We have to take
6 our needs into consideration, if that's what you
7 mean. We basically do that. I mean I can talk a
8 little bit maybe about the demand for us to be
9 staffing at some of these evacuation centers. And
10 although we had 1,500 of our staff, we basically
11 asked OEM, we told them we needed our people at
12 our developments for these situations. They're
13 very understanding of that.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
15 Let me just ask one quick question about the
16 earthquake because that was certainly something
17 that was not anticipated. It had an effect in Red
18 Hook. When the city determined that there was
19 this earthquake and you got news that some of the
20 bricks came tumbling down at Red Hook, can you
21 just talk us through how NYCHA engaged its workers
22 there and the residents there to handle that
23 situation?

24 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: That was a very
25 interesting day. As soon as we all felt the

1
2 earthquake, we went in what we would call our
3 emergency activation immediately. We started
4 calling each other, called all the properties
5 first. We asked every property manager to walk
6 his or her property and let us know if they have
7 any damage that they can see.

8 While that is happening, our
9 capital division from NYCHA was putting together
10 their engineers and their experts. They went out
11 to the field, first to those properties that we
12 identified that we might have any damage. And
13 then they help us through every building of the
14 2,600 buildings that we have.

15 That particular property, we
16 immediate secured the area, immediately; I think
17 it was that day or the next day we put the
18 scaffold to protect the chimney. We were doing
19 work there in that area. That means that we were
20 kind of lucky because nobody was hurt.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Let me ask you
22 this, Emergency Services Department, how long has
23 that been in existence at NYCHA?

24 ATEFEH RIAZI: I hear the last 75
25 years.

1
2 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: I believe it was
3 from the 60s on. I've seen, you know, black and
4 white pictures of emergency response vehicles as
5 far back as then. But I would check and get back
6 to you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
8 Chin?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I just wanted
10 to ask, does NYCHA have their own official
11 emergency procedure manual that you give to the
12 residents?

13 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: We have an
14 internal procedure manual for every single one of
15 the emergencies that we could think of, you know
16 snow, flooding, and that's an internal document,
17 but within those procedures, there are documents
18 that are given out to the residents as an
19 emergency takes place.

20 So, for instance, for the
21 hurricane, there's a part of the procedure for
22 flooding and evacuations that was given out to the
23 residents. That's some of the things you saw that
24 we were giving out door to door.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So are you

1 thinking about preparing something that could be
2 given out to residents, in different languages, on
3 different procedures so at least they have
4 something on hand?

5
6 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: Yes. As part of
7 the whitewash after the hurricane that we've done
8 internally is revamping that part of the
9 procedure.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So you are
11 looking towards--

12 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: [interposing] Oh
13 yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --creating
15 that brochure that you can give to residents.

16 CONRAD VAZQUEZ: In addition, as we
17 mentioned earlier, part of the Far Rockaway
18 initiatives that we did back in the early summer,
19 we're looking to take that to the additional 45
20 percent of our properties that are within flood
21 zones. So what we basically do at those meetings
22 is talk to residents about evacuations and
23 sheltering in place. And what the go-bag is, as
24 far as evacuation, and what the emergency kit as
25 far as sheltering in place, so that they have the

1
2 ability to take care of themselves while the city
3 figures out what we're going to do with that area
4 of the city.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay. I
6 think we would love to work with you on that to
7 make sure that all the tenants participate and so
8 they can get all this information. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So one last
10 comment and question, and here is where I date
11 myself. So when I was a kid in public school, we
12 used to have these rehearsals to evacuate and bomb
13 shelter and go underneath the desks. Now we know
14 how old I am, right? Stop laughing, guys. Stop.

15 But in light of the recent events
16 with the hurricane and the earthquake and
17 certainly I remember being outside a NYCHA
18 development in 2003 when the blackout happened,
19 and I was waiting for a friend who ran back in and
20 then she took the elevator down, because she knew
21 I was waiting. She made it down and then after
22 that the elevator stopped working.

23 Is there any kind of practice or
24 any kind of evacuation rehearsals being done for
25 residents that NYCHA currently does or is planning

1
2 to do in the near future?

3 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: As the GM
4 mentioned in her presentation, Commissioner Lopez
5 initiative was very successful. You spend several
6 meetings, six meetings in the Far Rockaway. We're
7 planning to take that to the developments in Zone
8 A and probably Zone B. Also, we're working in the
9 translation of some of the documents that we use.
10 I believe we're doing it in nine different
11 languages. That's part of our future planning.

12 Like the general manager mentioned,
13 every emergency is different. Every time that we
14 need to be in constant review, this exercise shows
15 the importance of the communication with elected
16 officials and the tenants and the need to have
17 some of this communication in a form that can be
18 easily accessed and the use of the technology, the
19 new technology to communicate with our residents.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very
21 much. Thank you much for being here and answering
22 all of our questions. I do hope, as you always
23 do, you keep someone here to listen to the
24 testimony, because we're going to have the great
25 State Senator from the Lower East Side of

Manhattan and Brooklyn up next.

ATEFEH RIAZI: Thank you very much for your time, your thoughtful questions and your continued support.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Before you begin your testimony, Mr. Senator, or Mr. State Senator, so that none of our current U.S. senators--

DANIEL SQUADRON: [interposing]
Thank you for the clarification.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --get worried.

DANIEL SQUADRON: I'd like to make it out of this building alive, so thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I have to say that your district overlaps with mine and Margaret Chin borders my district. It has been a pleasure and an honor to serve with the both of you.

Particularly during these kinds of emergencies, there's one thing to be a leader and it's another thing to be able to exercise leadership at the moment that we need it. I've been fortunate to work with two individuals who do just that, in addition to other people who are not

here today, Aixa Torres, who I think is still resting from the hurricane.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So anyway, thank you again.

DANIEL SQUADRON: Thank you very much. First of all, thank you for holding this hearing but to the Chairwoman, for everything you do. You know, I represent close to 35,000 public housing residents, and the work that you do on this committee, the work that you do ensuring that they're treated with dignity and in the best possible way is extraordinary. And, of course, in terms of being a local representative, I've learned a lot.

And also, to Council Member Chin, who I'm going to talk about a little bit in my testimony, but who has been such a force on the scene now for a year and a half and certainly was around the hurricane. Thank you both also for being here for my testimony. I appreciate it.

Look, as you know and as you heard, there were a lot of challenges kind of going into the evacuation of Hurricane Irene. There were a

1
2 lot of ways in which, frankly, I don't think
3 either NYCHA or the city were sort of fully
4 prepared for the number of public housing
5 residents who were in the evacuation zone.

6 It's also true, and this is
7 important, and the folks who just testified should
8 hear this, and the city administration should, in
9 those 72 hours, the level of engagement and
10 responsiveness was I think truly extraordinary. I
11 think that's true from City Hall through into the
12 agencies and certainly from NYCHA from the chair
13 and the other commissioners down the entire line
14 to folks on the ground, and certainly to Brian
15 Honan and the Deputy General Manager Laboy and
16 others.

17 Nothing we say here should take
18 away from that. I think the appreciation we all
19 feel and the credit that everyone deserves for the
20 way that folks operated in those 72 hours.

21 Thank goodness the situation wasn't
22 worse than it was and thank goodness we have this
23 opportunity to make sure that next time we won't
24 need that kind of extraordinary leadership in
25 those 72 hours because the plans will be, frankly,

1
2 better and more complete. That's why this hearing
3 is really so important.

4 I actually expected it to be
5 overflowing with folks because this is the
6 question, right? Everyone said boy that went
7 great. The truth is a lot of folks operated in a
8 wonderful way in those 72 hours and the storm
9 wasn't as bad as we had feared. We need to do
10 exactly this kind of hearing to make sure next
11 time we're prepared for something that could be a
12 whole lot worse.

13 Just to give you a sense, both
14 Council Member Chin and I represent Battery Park
15 City and also represent the Lower East Side.
16 Between the five NYCHA developments that are in
17 Zone A, between Council Member Mendez and Council
18 Member Chin, I represent about 18,000 residents
19 who live in Zone A. Battery Park City, just
20 across town, has about 8,000 residents. Now the
21 truth is those 18,000 residents who live in NYCHA
22 in Zone A and those 8,000 residents who live in
23 Battery Park City in Zone A both had to evacuate.
24 They were facing serious risks to their homes, to
25 safety, to their families if they didn't.

1
2 It's also undeniable that the
3 public discussion leading up to the evacuation was
4 significantly more about Battery Park City than it
5 was about the NYCHA developments just across town.
6 You know, I think that's telling in a lot of ways.
7 I think that we can't, as policymakers, and we
8 can't allow the agencies as the folks who really
9 have the responsibility for evacuation, to be
10 confused by some of the inevitabilities,
11 unfortunate inevitabilities or the way media
12 coverage and public focus works.

13 The Battery Park City evacuation
14 went extraordinarily well, and that is a great
15 thing. Battery Park City authority deserves
16 credit. The NYCHA evacuation was spottier,
17 frankly. Council Member Chin and Aixa Torres were
18 literally on the ground, through the course of
19 Saturday, many hours. I think they continued
20 there. I got to Smith Houses around 5:15. They
21 had just left with a 90 percent evacuation rate.
22 So six hours of evacuation after public
23 transportation was shut down still got a 90
24 percent evacuation rate. That's extraordinary.

25 Some other developments that we

1
2 represent were more like 30 percent. Overall, on
3 the Lower East Side of those 18,000 residents, the
4 best estimates are about 50 percent only were
5 evacuated. I think by any measure that's a spotty
6 record.

7 Why is that and why is it harder in
8 NYCHA? NYCHA residents are less likely that
9 Battery Park City residents, for example, to have
10 friends and relatives in far flung neighborhoods
11 that are easily accessible, less likely to own
12 their own vehicle, after public transportation
13 shuts down. More likely to have a language
14 barrier, especially in the Lower East Side, more
15 likely to have language barriers, and more likely
16 to find sort of some of the traditional structure
17 of communication not to be credible, based on
18 historic relationships with them.

19 Each of those factors I think is
20 predictable. I think all of us who represent
21 public housing residents would be able to predict
22 them. I'm not sure the evacuation plan fully
23 predicted them and dealt with them.

24 As of the Friday before, the three
25 of us and Assembly Member Kavanagh were on the

1
2 phone with deputy mayors and found there was no
3 transportation option post 11 a.m. that was
4 public, after the public transportation system
5 shut down. We were able to work together and get
6 buses to every development. In the case of Smith
7 Houses, those buses were used. In the case of
8 some other places, I was in the Lower East Side
9 with the chairman, they were sitting outside
10 unused. I have some striking pictures of the same
11 buses there hour after hour, waiting for people.
12 Getting the buses was a great victory; doing it at
13 the last second made them less effective than they
14 would have been.

15 The issues of language I think have
16 been covered effectively in this hearing to this
17 point, but can't be stressed enough.

18 Communicating in only English and assuming that
19 folks that are going to A, understand and B, take
20 that seriously with credibility just doesn't make
21 sense. We need to be conscious that we have a
22 city both of immigrants and of communities of
23 language density. That's what being a New Yorker
24 is. We need to in emergency situations not learn
25 that lesson again and again. We need to be

1 prepared to deal with that lesson.

2 The partnership between tenant
3 associations, local elected officials, NYCHA and
4 the city was extraordinary in Smith Houses, was
5 frankly less good in other places. The work
6 necessary, before an emergency happens, to develop
7 those relationships and partnerships is the only
8 way to leverage them in the case of an emergency.

9 So, look, anyone who tells you that
10 it's impossible to have a 90 percent evacuation
11 rate in a community that has a high proportion of
12 folks for whom English is not the first language,
13 a high proportion of folks in poverty, a high
14 proportion of folks who don't own their own
15 vehicles, it's not true. Margaret made it happen,
16 along with NYCHA, Margaret and NYCHA and Aixa made
17 it happen.

18 So we know it is possible. What we
19 need to do, and because we have that model, is we
20 need to take the lessons learned there and apply
21 them citywide now so that we can enact them when
22 the next emergency happens. Pretty clear. We
23 need to have teams in the case of emergencies that
24 involve NYCHA staff, local leaders and tenant
25

1
2 associations. We just know who they are ahead of
3 the emergency. Development to development to
4 development, who is the team, what's the chain of
5 command in NYCHA, who are the local leaders, who
6 are the tenant folks, have they met, do they know
7 what they're going to do.

8 Second, we have to know not just
9 folks who have barriers to mobility, we also need
10 to know folks who have language access issues so
11 that we can directly communicate with residents in
12 their language.

13 Third, we need to have
14 communication not just from the Mayor, and again
15 the Mayor deserves enormous credit for his clear,
16 forceful and repeated communication. We need to
17 have communication from validators in communities
18 who have credibility. We need to know who they
19 are and we need to have a way to disseminate their
20 message.

21 The truth is, and we all know this,
22 messages that just come on NYCHA letterhead or
23 just come from the voice of the Mayor aren't
24 necessarily the messages that are going to have
25 the most credibility in certain communities.

1
2 Who's will and how can we have a process in place
3 to disseminate those?

4 And the fourth is I would like to
5 encourage NYCHA to do a fuller accounting, a
6 fuller analysis of where evacuations worked well
7 and where they didn't. From our five
8 developments, we have some pretty good anecdotal
9 evidence. We have some pretty good experience.
10 We've walked those developments. We know the
11 residents. We talk to them almost every day.

12 I'd love to see on a citywide basis
13 what happened in each development that was in Zone
14 A. And I'd like to see NYCHA's analysis of why.
15 I can guarantee you we're not going to agree with
16 it 100 percent, but it's also certain that it will
17 be a helpful part of this conversation. Under no
18 circumstances can we enter the next emergency, the
19 next citywide emergency with the plan we had in
20 place for this one.

21 I do believe that between the
22 extraordinary work that the agencies and the local
23 leaders exercised in those 72 hours we have enough
24 information to go into the next emergency as
25 prepared as we absolutely can be.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

This is very important, all the stuff you mentioned. Some of my developments were the ones where those buses were sitting out there. I remember standing there in the rain and some people, I had to help seniors hail cabs at the last minute because they were going to go stay with family. But it was very frustrating to see all those buses go empty and to see what was a very up and down, a very high evacuation rate and others middle and very low in some of the others.

It didn't help that we were out there the day before because of the good weather, and certainly after the Parks Department closed the parks, I saw everybody still out there playing basketball. You know, that's what they say, I guess the quiet before the storm. They just don't believe it's going to happen.

But I think the Senator is very correct, that if we can try to do some analysis of those different developments and then do it in some of the other Zone A areas to see what worked and what didn't work, so that we can work collectively with our leaders and the leaders can

1
2 work with their residents to ensure that next time
3 there's an emergency, like was mentioned we got
4 lucky that the storm wasn't as bad as we thought.
5 But, you know, in some of my developments it would
6 have been a disaster if those waves would have
7 topped 15, 20 feet like we anticipated that it
8 might.

9 Council Member Chin, any questions
10 or comments?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah. I also
12 thank the Senator for coming today and for your
13 recommendation and also for your staff's help in
14 terms of getting buses there and also reaching out
15 to volunteers in the community. It's just amazing
16 that yes, you know, we were blessed that the storm
17 wasn't as severe, but I think that NYCHA, my
18 compliment is really to Brian and also to our
19 development's TA president. Aixa, she has all our
20 cell phone numbers.

21 DANIEL SQUADRON: And she uses
22 them.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: And she uses
24 them and she calls, you know, emergency meeting
25 even before the storm, to get information out. I

1
2 think the coordination of elected officials, I
3 remember staff, you know, working together on an
4 information sheet in three languages and my staff
5 was doing the Chinese and Spanish translation last
6 minute to get very specific information out to
7 people, in terms of where the shelters are.

8 Even on the debate about whether
9 you can bring your dog, your pets to the shelter,
10 was critical. And I remember my staff said you
11 can't put that in there because they said the
12 shelter did allow pets. And I think that made it
13 important for people, you know, with pets at home
14 that they weren't going to evacuate if they
15 couldn't bring their pets with them. So the more
16 specific information we could give to the tenant,
17 the better they can make the decision whether they
18 want to evacuate or not.

19 I mean fortunate for a lot of the
20 NYCHA residents they have relatives in other NYCHA
21 residences. So if you're in Zone A and your
22 relative is in Zone B, then you go over there, you
23 know they went to stay with family members there.
24 So I think that really sort of helped and that's
25 where NYCHA residents went. They went to

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relatives that lives in other--

DANIEL SQUADRON: [interposing] I actually believe Aixa was heading over to Vladeck as I saw her at 5:30 on that afternoon.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yes, and she did.

DANIEL SQUADRON: Although on the other hand, I spoke to someone earlier in the day at Wald who had a relative--I don't remember what the relation was--in Riis Houses just north of it, also in Zone A. So, you know, you talked about the access to far flung, you know Vladeck I believe is in Zone B, so just out of Zone A.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: But I think also the shelter that the city set up, that I was able to visit the one on Grand Street, I mean the volunteers there and the city personnel, they were very, very welcoming and they took care of residents.

I was helping another senior development in my district that is not NYCHA, which is senior housing, and we ended up using car service to bring the residents there. Even on wheelchairs, and people there were so supportive

1
2 and helpful. So I think it's just coordination
3 and really--you know last minute we all got
4 creative and we got local media to help out. But
5 all of the lessons that were learned, I think we
6 really need to codify that.

7 And so that, the general manager
8 they talked about earlier, how do we put those
9 into brochures and so people have it at home, what
10 to do when an emergency happens, whether it's a
11 snowstorm or a hurricane or whatever. So as much
12 information that we can give to residents I think
13 it's important.

14 I think we are all blessed with
15 really good staff. Some of my staff are here and
16 our staff and all our Council Members' staff, it's
17 like they know different languages and the
18 different dialects on my staff came in handy. But
19 they also were available on call. I mean I had
20 one staff who was in Flushing who took the
21 Chinatown van back--

22 DANIEL SQUADRON: I was going to
23 say, headed into Zone A--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --to help
25 out.

1
2 DANIEL SQUADRON: --from other
3 parts of the city. I think we all had staff who
4 did that, which is pretty extraordinary, not
5 necessarily what they sign up for.

6 You pointed out the language
7 pieces, and I mentioned it before, though they're
8 not here both Speaker Silver and Assemblyman
9 Kavanagh were deeply involved in this. In the
10 case of Assemblyman Kavanagh, on the ground,
11 literally sort of screaming and yelling at whoever
12 he needed to, to push it. And Speaker Silver
13 helped to coordinate and quarterback that multi-
14 language document early. So the partnership
15 between the elected officials and NYCHA's openness
16 was a big part of it.

17 The final piece that I just
18 actually skipped over that I just think is an
19 important one is partnership with the uniformed
20 agencies earlier. The verticals by the Police
21 Department were mentioned. Those didn't actually
22 start until after public transportation had shut
23 down, which, again we were creative in dealing
24 with that fact, but that needs to happen early.
25 That is different when you have verticals either

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2 from FDNY or the Police Department actually
3 knocking on every door. As much as NYCHA staff
4 were out doing that starting Friday, that's
5 significantly more dramatic.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yes. Thank
7 you.

8 DANIEL SQUADRON: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

10 One of the things that Council Member Chin
11 mentioned about the pet policy is something that's
12 very important. As we saw in Hurricane Katrina in
13 New Orleans, a lot of people refused to evacuate
14 their homes because they did not want to leave
15 their pets. That was something that I did
16 encounter in my district, as well as we all did.
17 So that's a bigger citywide issue that we need to
18 address.

19 Thank you, Senator Squadron, again,
20 always a pleasure to work with you.

21 DANIEL SQUADRON: Thank you. Thank
22 you again for doing this. Nothing is more
23 important. You know, right now the room is not
24 full, but you can be sure 72 hours before the next
25 storm, we're going to be grateful that you had the

foresight. So, thank you, again.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

The next person to testify is Nancy Ortiz, tenant president of Vladeck Houses. She's the only one signed up to testify. So anyone else wants to get on this panel? Anyone else wants to get on this panel? Okay.

[Pause]

NANCY ORTIZ: Is it okay here?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

NANCY ORTIZ: Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

NANCY ORTIZ: First and foremost, I would like to thank my Councilwoman Rosie Mendez and Margaret Chin for affording us the opportunity in this forum to discuss our issues as residents of New York City Housing Authority and opening the forum with the members of the New York City Housing Authority. So I thank you for this opportunity.

Relative to the hurricane, Mother Nature is very unpredictable. So it gives us very little time to plan ahead. Relative to the hurricane, Vladeck Houses was very fortunate. We

1
2 are on a kind of like a downhill-cline, so our
3 issue was more of those little drainages that
4 needed to be cleaned out and it worked. Vladeck
5 had minimal damages, minimal issues. The staff in
6 Vladeck was excellent.

7 I was very honored and fortunate to
8 work with Aixa Torres at Smith Houses. I truly
9 believe that New York City Housing Authority
10 should look at what worked, what didn't work, take
11 what worked, put it together and start sharing it.
12 I believe in the each one teach one. I believe
13 collaboratively with the elected officials, the
14 resident leaders, the residents and all of the
15 volunteers, we did an excellent and an outstanding
16 job in the Lower East Side.

17 Insofar as the snowstorm, Vladeck
18 Houses was a mess. We had no equipment. Even
19 residents were shoveling. I had a resident on a
20 wheelchair shoveling because the equipment that we
21 had was not working. All I am asking is we had to
22 reach out to Baruch Houses to come with their
23 equipment so that they can assist us in shoveling
24 passages and pathways for the residents to be able
25 to walk. All we ask is maybe one or two power

gators to clean the snow out in Vladeck Houses because our power equipment is completely useless. We did three straight days of shoveling, literally.

That's my only major concern in those areas. We are working very hard with NYCHA to obtain the necessary items and staffings that we need, and NYCHA is being very receptive to our concerns. I'm not here to beat anyone up; I'm just here to say the truth. We need a manager. Please.

Other than that, that's all I really need to say. As I said before, there has been a constant open communication with the NYCHA staff and the residents at Vladeck Houses to address our needs. And when our needs are not addressed I do believe Council Member Mendez and Council Member Chin's office get phone calls from me.

Other than that, I would like to thank everyone for their time and their effort and everything that they have done during the hurricane season for us. I hope that during this winter season we learn from last year and we are

1
2 able to all work collaboratively together and get
3 things done in a more efficient manner. Thank
4 you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
6 Ms. Ortiz?

7 NANCY ORTIZ: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: If you could,
9 since you've been a resident of Vladeck for a
10 while, could you go back through your memory banks
11 and think about what were some of the problems
12 that like the residents at Vladeck experienced
13 after 9/11 and after some of the blackouts and
14 what could have been done better. And in terms of
15 the blizzard, since I was on foot, that was the
16 one development I didn't get to walk to, that one
17 and the one by Bellevue, too much walking for me,
18 particularly in the snow. It was getting to the
19 development for me that was the problem. So thank
20 you for telling us about the blizzard.

21 Do you have anything to tell us
22 about the other situations?

23 NANCY ORTIZ: With 9/11, I could
24 tell you that as a 9/11 responder, I was a first
25 9/11 responder, NYCHA provided us with all of

1
2 their alternators in order for us to be able to
3 function at the morgue. I was instrumental in
4 also OEM.

5 When I got to my development, it
6 was very difficult. Everyone was in a very
7 difficult state of mind. We had no phone services
8 until I believe December is when the phone service
9 came back up. They had placed temporary phone
10 services. NYCHA was extraordinary, the management
11 staff that we had, they actually spent the night.
12 They worked nonstop to ensure that we had two
13 residents at the time who were on life support
14 system. They made sure that those residents were
15 well taken care of and that there was someone with
16 them at all times.

17 We had two blackouts actually, a
18 temporary blackout that made me late for work.
19 They took care of that immediately. I believe
20 that was in August. And during the second
21 blackout, they did take care of all of the seniors
22 who were on life-sustaining equipment or had
23 oxygen or were on wheelchairs, and they were able
24 to place them with the assistance of Good
25 Companion who had a generator and was able to turn

1
2 on the lights in there and place them in there
3 where they would be comfortable.

4 I went door knocking. I tried to
5 assist as many residents as possible. Some areas
6 were more affected than others. I opened up my TA
7 room to try to help other people. We tried to
8 collaboratively as a family in Vladeck to try to
9 make the best that we could. We started
10 barbecuing outside so our meat didn't go bad.
11 Thank God we had no incidents. Everything was
12 fine.

13 As I said, NYCHA worked very well
14 with us. We were in constant communication. I
15 had really no major, major issues during the
16 blackout. It was what it was. We had no
17 electricity, no nothing. We did the best we
18 could, and that was take some charcoal, put out
19 some grills and everybody ate.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. I
21 just want to emphasize and give some background.
22 Nancy mentioned there was no telephone service
23 after 9/11. There was no elevator service. We
24 had volunteers from NYCHA and the community
25 delivering water up to seniors who could not come

1
2 down from their apartments and also assessing who
3 needed things like insulin and could not leave
4 their apartments. Verizon set up these phone
5 wells out on the street so that people could go
6 out, could make phone calls.

7 Nancy mentioned Good Companions
8 which is the senior center located in Vladeck.
9 That is the cooling center that I mentioned
10 earlier actually.

11 Geographically, Vladeck is a
12 stone's throw away, not too far in walking
13 distance from the World Trade Center and many of
14 the residents there were able to see the towers as
15 they collapsed. In the days after had to deal
16 with a lot of the traumatic experience.

17 NANCY ORTIZ: Well, we went into
18 marshal law. Vladeck Houses had no deliveries of
19 services for about a week.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yeah, actually
21 south of 14th Street. That was the zone where
22 very limited deliveries could be done.

23 NANCY ORTIZ: No--

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
25 You didn't have any at all.

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NANCY ORTIZ: Nothing.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: North of Houston Street, we had some limited deliveries, but we didn't have in our stores milk or batteries or newspapers. We couldn't get it.

NANCY ORTIZ: I believe Pathmark, if I'm not mistaken, because the emergency command center. Pathmark was literally empty. There was nothing on their shelves. Since I was able to travel into Queens, I would go to the seniors in my building and the adjacent buildings to give me a list of the bare essential things that they needed and I would bring it back to them from Queens with my vehicle.

I couldn't do it for everyone in Vladeck because I had to go to work. But I tried to help as many people as possible with the basic essentials that they needed in order to function until we were able to start allowing deliveries to come back into the neighborhood again.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So with the Housing Authority that's one of the things I would ask. As you know who is in wheelchairs and what apartments they're in, maybe you don't know who's

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2 an insulin dependent diabetic, who is on a life
3 support system, who may need certain oxygen tanks
4 in order to breath.

5 I know when the blackout happened,
6 a friend of mine and I ran to a friend's house who
7 had emphysema. She did not live in public
8 housing, across the street from public housing,
9 but we got there and her daughter had gotten there
10 before us, and she was being rushed to the
11 hospital because there was no electricity in the
12 building and her oxygen tanks couldn't deliver the
13 oxygen that she needed.

14 So these are some of the things I
15 think that we can work with the Authority and the
16 Authority needs to know in case we have another
17 blackout or another emergency.

18 So, Ms. Ortiz, thank you for coming
19 here and testifying. Certainly, your testimony
20 gave light to some other issues. I know that
21 Council Member Chin and I are proud that we share
22 Vladeck together and that we work with you. To
23 the NYCHA representatives and the Mayor's
24 representatives that stayed here for all the
25 testimony, I want to thank you. This hearing is

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COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

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coming to a close. Thank you.

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NANCY ORTIZ: Thank you.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Donna Hintze

Date December 29, 2011