

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

-----X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

-----X

January 17, 2013
Start: 1:21 p.m.
Recess: 6:20 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E: ROSIE MENDEZ
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Christine C. Quinn
Rosie Mendez
Maria del Carmen Arroyo
Melissa Mark-Viverito
Margaret S. Chin
James G. Van Bramer
Daniel J. Halloran III
Robert Jackson
Brad Lander
Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.
Gale A. Brewer
Stephen Levin
Sara M. Gonzalez
Letitia James

A P P E A R A N C E S

Cecil House
General Manager
NYCHA

Carlos Laboy-Diaz
Executive VP for Operations
NYCHA

Raymond Ribeiro
Executive VP for Capital Projects
NYCHA

Valerie Jean
Executive Director
FUREE

Beverly Corbin
Board Member
FUREE

Sonja Shield
Staff Attorney
South Brooklyn Legal Services

Peggy Earisma
Director of Manhattan Project
Legal Services NYC

Alvin Bartolomey
Co-chair
FUREE

Deedra Cheatham
FUREE

Robyn Hillman-Harrigan
Director
Rockaway Rescue Alliance

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Gigi Li
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 3

Gary Bagley
Executive Director
New York Cares

Lara Weibyen
People's Relief

Ann Valdez
Leader
Community Voices Heard

Evangelean Pugh
Community Voices Heard

Gilbert Alicea
GOLES

Emilee Rosenblatt
On behalf of
Damaris Reyes
Executive Director
GOLES

Nancy Ortiz
TA President
Vladeck Houses

Florence Dent-Hunter
TA President
Chelsea Houses

Reginald Bowman
Chairman
Citywide Council of Presidents of the New York City
Housing Authority

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Ann Dibble
Director
Storm Response Unit
New York Legal Assistance Group

Harvey Epstein
Associate Director
Urban Justice Director

Caroline Nagy
Policy Associate for Housing and Homelessness
Citizens Committee for Children of New York

Joel Kupferman
New York Environmental Law and Justice Project

Tiger Paul Schubert

Yetta Kurland

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Good

afternoon. Can you hear me? Yes. I am Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, and I chair the Committee on Public Housing. I am joined today by the Speaker of the City Council Christine Quinn, who will speak after my opening remarks.

We are here today to evaluate the New York City Housing Authority's preparation and response to Superstorm Sandy, the disastrous storm that swept through our city back in October. Sandy cause a lot of devastation to NYCHA residents and to NYCHA buildings.

Here are a few photos that I would like to share with you, some as recent as last week, showing some of the damage of the Sandy-impacted developments. In this picture, you will see we are with Commissioner Lopez, Margaret Chin and I. We had a meeting in Lower Manhattan of leaders, all weekend long, preparing for the possible evacuation, which the order did come down. Next.

This is PSA 4, which is on East Eighth Street and Avenue C in my district, and PSA 4 is on the corner, on the northeast corner. That

1 is the night of the storm. You can see some of
2 the police cruisers are under water. Today, PSA 4
3 still does not have functioning phones, in a
4 precinct that covers all of the developments in
5 Lower Manhattan south of 35th Street. Next. And
6 that's Zone B, by the way. That wasn't the
7 mandatory evacuation area.
8

9 This is LES 5 in my district. This
10 is the backyard the day after the storm, on
11 Tuesday, where you could see all the water. If
12 you look higher, you could see where the water
13 was. That little opening on the bottom is
14 basement and the next one is the windowsill up on
15 top on the ground floor. Just to give a sense of
16 all the water that did come into our buildings in
17 the Lower East Side and in some of the areas it
18 was more harder hit. Next?

19 This is in Coney Island. This is a
20 picture taken on Friday. I went there. You could
21 see some cleanup has begun. This is the
22 development ground between the buildings, and
23 there's still a lot of sand there, so there's
24 still a lot more work to be done. Next?

25 Just another view of the area there

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

on the development grounds. Next?

This is the community center. The windows, if you could see these little cubed windows behind me, water came in and actually blew out all those windows, and water got into the Hammel Houses Community Center, and it's still being renovated. I got a tour of the inside. Next?

This is in the basement of the Far Rockaways. It's about 50 feet down, with some stairs. I was standing on top. The force of the water blew out one of the walls down in the basement, as well as some of their electrical equipment. Next?

Just another photo down in the Rockaways, so you could just get a sense. These pictures now are all as of Friday and Saturday. Next?

So what we're seeing in a lot of our developments now is these generators and boilers that are outside, actually getting heat into the building. This is one in Far Rockaway. You can see the little shelter that's encasing the boiler. Next?

1
2 That is in Red Hook. The water, if
3 you see the windows, those windows are a foot off
4 the ground on the outside. So all of that got
5 flooded. Next?

6 I thought that was interesting.
7 That's a non-functioning boiler in Red Hook that
8 is still leaking--I don't know--I'm assuming salt
9 water, something.

10 SPEAKER QUINN: It's not good.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I hope that
12 was before Superstorm Sandy. Right? Okay, not
13 funny. Next?

14 This is a hole in one of the
15 basements that the force of the water knocked a
16 whole wall down there. Next?

17 This is just to give you a sense.
18 I'm standing next to one of the other holes in one
19 of their basements. Next?

20 That's it. All right, thank you.
21 I hope that was helpful.

22 So today, I expect that we're going
23 to hear two things. We're going to hear about the
24 planning for the storm and how that plan was
25 executed. We are going to hear about what really

1
2 happened. These are things that NYCHA had to
3 improvise as the disaster unfolded. In reviewing
4 what worked and what did not, it is important for
5 all of us and for NYCHA to remember that changes
6 must be made to both planning and to execution.

7 For example, we had residents that
8 got stranded without food, drinking water, running
9 water and/or other supplies. It is my
10 understanding that NYCHA does have a plan, a plan
11 that they have not shared with us, by the way,
12 that deals with ensuring that food and supplies
13 reach stranded residents for a few days. NYCHA
14 does not have a plan for dealing with a situation
15 where residents are stranded for a week or two
16 weeks or more.

17 Clearly, there are many kind of
18 disasters that can leave residents stranded for
19 more than a few days, so NYCHA and this city needs
20 to be planning for a longer relief timeline.

21 It is also my understanding that
22 some residents, particularly those at Red Hook
23 Houses, weren't receiving supplies even those
24 first few days. To me that sounds like a failure
25 in execution. So in some cases, it's not just the

1
2 plan was incomplete, it's that the plan also
3 failed. Or that the plan was not a plan that
4 could deal with widespread problems spread over
5 several boroughs of incredible magnitude.

6 I saw the National Guard knocking
7 on doors in Baruch Houses. However, I have 14
8 developments in my district that were all in the
9 blackout zone and many in the flooded areas of
10 Zone A and Zone B. I concluded that NYCHA and the
11 National Guard were never going to get to all the
12 buildings, as well as all the developments in
13 Council Member Chin and Speaker Quinn's district,
14 never mind the Rockaways, never mind Coney Island
15 and Red Hook. That's why my not-for-profit, my
16 colleagues, thousands of volunteers and I decided
17 to occupy Sandy.

18 This was not the first time a major
19 storm hit the city. On November 22, 2011, this
20 committee held a hearing to focus on internal
21 protocols and procedures to and following up on
22 emergency situations that included the December
23 2010 snowstorm, the August 2011 earthquake and
24 Hurricane Irene. We were told then that NYCHA was
25 going to be making some improvements to its

1
2 emergency planning in light of the things that
3 happened during Irene.

4 We were told, for instance, that
5 NYCHA would be alerting residents of pending
6 danger much, much earlier, and that better methods
7 and technologies would be used for that outreach.
8 We were told that NYCHA was going to improve its
9 coordination with local elected officials and with
10 the community organizations on the ground. We
11 were told that evacuation preparedness was going
12 to be ramped up. That practice drills in places
13 like the Rockaways would be expanded so that
14 they'd run in every development that's in a
15 flooded area.

16 Today, I want to know which, if any
17 of those things happened. How many of those
18 promisers were delivered on. I expect that
19 emotions will run high during this hearing,
20 because we have seen firsthand just how much some
21 have lost. That is why it's so important for us
22 to find out exactly what went wrong so that the
23 city's public housing residents can be prepared
24 and provided for should another disaster hit.

25 I want to take one moment, because

1
2 I know I saw many of the NYCHA employees working
3 around the clock, sleeping in the developments,
4 many who lost their own homes out in the Rockaways
5 or in Staten Island. To each and every one of
6 them, on behalf of the city, I want to say thank
7 you. Thank you for what you did during that time
8 and to our first responders and volunteers.
9 Because if not for all of that, the situation
10 would have been far worse.

11 I now want to turn it over to my
12 Speaker and I want to thank the Authority for
13 being here today. Speaker Christine Quinn.

14 SPEAKER QUINN: Thank you very
15 much. I first, just on a housekeeping issue, want
16 to say, just so my colleagues are aware, Chair
17 Rhea is on jury duty, and the Authority did notify
18 us of that, and we could have delayed the hearing.
19 We felt it was more important to move forward.
20 Mr. House was in some ways the lead person on
21 things. So I don't want anyone to think there was
22 any disrespect from the Authority that Chair Rhea
23 is not here. We had that option and we felt we
24 needed to go forward. Then obviously, if there
25 are follow-up things, the Chair has been very

clear he'll help. So I didn't want there to be any misunderstanding about that at all.

Let me just do one thing before I make an opening statement, which is a little bit out of protocol, but I'm the Speaker. The plan Chair Mendez mentioned, as I understand it, you said you couldn't--not you personally, Mr. House--but the Authority indicated to us that they could not present that to us until they had gotten City Hall's approval. You need to say yes or no. Sorry.

CECIL HOUSE: The request for those plans for all city agencies are being coordinated through City Hall. So I think that what--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] Hang on one second. So you don't have the plan here?

CECIL HOUSE: No.

SPEAKER QUINN: Does that mean City Hall said no?

CECIL HOUSE: No, no, I think--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] So why would you not have gotten--do you believe they're going to say no?

CECIL HOUSE: I do not know. I

1 think they're coordinating the delivery of those
2 plans--
3

4 SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] I
5 don't understand. It was no disrespect in that
6 Chair Rhea is here, but I want to start right now
7 by saying I would like an answer before the end of
8 this hearing from City Hall about when we will get
9 that plan. I do not ever want the Authority to
10 come back again to this body, having requested a
11 plan and not having gotten an answer. I do not
12 think it was a complicated thing. With all due
13 respect, if you couldn't have gotten an answer out
14 of City Hall, you should have just told us that,
15 because we would have gotten an answer out of City
16 Hall. It's unfair to cast aspersions on the
17 Mayor's Office when you should have gotten an
18 answer one way or another.

19 So there are people here from the
20 Mayor's Office. Can you please just get us an
21 answer on whether or not we will be getting that
22 report? When we get that report, I would ask the
23 Chair, and I know she's going to say yes, to
24 reconvene this Sandy hearing so we can, in
25 specifics, review that report. So can you have

1
2 someone from your staff please go over to the
3 bullpen and make sure we get that answer? Thank
4 you, Brian.

5 That said, I want to thank Chair
6 Mendez--sorry, the signage--Chair Mendez for
7 holding this oversight hearing. I also want to
8 thank her for all of the work she did at the
9 developments in her district, which I know was
10 extensive. I was out there on some days with her
11 and Commissioner Lopez and others and they were
12 very much on the ground, as many of the Council
13 Members were who are here today and others who are
14 not able to be here.

15 As the pictures that Chair Mendez
16 had on the screen show, there was damage beyond
17 anything we could have imagined. That whole,
18 which I think was in the Red Hook Houses, shows a
19 force of a storm that's hard to believe, even
20 though we know this was a storm that took too many
21 lives; we know this was a storm that wiped away
22 homes. To see a hole like that, it is still
23 jarring at the force of what the water must have
24 been. So everyone here is sympathetic about the
25 challenges the Authority was facing in responding.

1
2 That said, I think we have great
3 concern in the Council that even with that the
4 response from the Authority was not what we
5 believe it should have been. In part, I don't say
6 that because the lights weren't put back on
7 quickly enough or the power wasn't put back on
8 quickly enough. For me, the bigger question is
9 why did it take so long to understand the nature
10 of the problem in each of the developments?

11 Not that I wouldn't have wanted all
12 of the lights and power to go on more quickly, I
13 would have. But what for me was more frustrating
14 was that we seemed so challenging to actually
15 understand what the ABC of each problem in each
16 development was, and until we understood the ABC
17 it was very hard to have a plan. Not
18 understanding the ABC, not having a plan, it was
19 hard to communicate to New Yorkers what they had
20 to expect.

21 No one expected good news in the
22 days after Sandy, but they wanted to know what the
23 truth was. Even if it was that they were going to
24 be out of their homes for a really long period of
25 time, they needed to know. I was frustrated in

1
2 how challenging that was. So that's really what I
3 hope to understand better today with the long-term
4 goal, and this would be part of why we want the
5 plan, so we can be here to be helpful moving
6 forward.

7 Chair Mendez is absolutely right.
8 We have had other hearings and we have seen the
9 Authority take positive steps. During Hurricane
10 Irene, there was not immediately buses in place;
11 Hurricane Sandy, there was immediately buses in
12 place; a clear example of the Authority
13 recognizing when they didn't do something
14 perfectly and doing it better. So we know,
15 obviously, that that is possible and that in the
16 long-term is what today's hearing is about and why
17 it is so important and so unfortunate we did not
18 have that plan in advance so we could work more
19 collaboratively together moving forward.

20 I also want to echo what Chair
21 Mendez said about the workers in the Housing
22 Authority, who in my opinion worked as hard as
23 they possibly could have, around the clock, many
24 of them having lost homes of their own.

25 There are two particular questions

I just want to put on the record early that I think are important, if you can answer either in your testimony or right after your testimony. Which is that exactly when in the response to Sandy were the generators, and other machinery that was needed ordered and what was the process leading up to that date and why they were ordered on those dates?

Two: what were the decision making process for the distribution of staff resources, since in some developments we heard of process servers, or whatever the right title is, going out with eviction and other notices. Who made that decision to distribute staff in what way when there was still need?

So, again, I want to thank you and your staff for all of your hard work. We look forward to doing what we can to make things better moving forward in the next disaster, in the Housing Authority's response. I, again, just want to thank the Chair very much for this and her other oversight hearings on the Authority.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Mr. House, you can give your testimony, and please identify

yourself for the record, and those at the table with you.

CECIL HOUSE: Speaker Quinn, Chairwoman Mendez and members of the Public Housing Committee. Good enough?

SPEAKER QUINN: [off mic]

CECIL HOUSE: No, it's on.

SPEAKER QUINN: [off mic]

CECIL HOUSE: Sure. Test. Can you hear me now? Speaker Quinn, Chairwoman Mendez, members of the Public Housing Committee and distinguished members of City Council, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the New York City Housing Authority's preparation for, response to, and continuing recovery from Hurricane Sandy.

I am Cecil House, General Manager of the New York City Housing Authority. Joining me this afternoon are Carlos Laboy-Diaz, to my left the Executive Vice President for Operations, and Raymond Ribeiro, Executive Vice President for Capital Projects, to my right.

As the members of this Committee well know, the New York City Housing Authority serves over 600,000 New Yorkers in neighborhoods

1 across the city, many of which are in vulnerable,
2 low-lying areas in proximity to the rivers, bays
3 and oceans that surround our city. Twenty-six
4 NYCHA developments, home to over 45,000 residents,
5 are in the city's designated Flood Zone A.
6 However, 80,000 NYCHA residents were directly
7 impacted by the storm.
8

9 In the months since Hurricane Sandy
10 hit, many have noted the unlikely convergence of
11 exceptional circumstances that Hurricane Sandy
12 presented and indeed, the devastation that
13 resulted across the city and in NYCHA
14 developments. The days and weeks after Hurricane
15 Sandy were no doubt a trying time for thousands of
16 NYCHA residents and employees.

17 NYCHA addressed the storm's
18 devastation systematically, according to an
19 established emergency plan, and met unexpected
20 challenges with flexibility and innovation. We
21 believe the actions we took brought back essential
22 services to NYCHA residents as quickly as possible
23 given the unprecedented challenges we faced.

24 Collaborating purposefully with a
25 host of partners at all levels of government, in

1
2 the private and nonprofit sectors, and within
3 local communities, NYCHA staff worked around the
4 clock, surpassing the efforts of most other
5 landlords in these communities, restoring
6 services, making repairs, and connecting residents
7 to resources and supplies.

8 We received constant support from
9 Mayor Bloomberg, as well as Deputy Mayors Steel,
10 Holloway, and Gibbs, and we are grateful for the
11 work of elected officials like Speaker Quinn,
12 Chairwoman Mendez and other members of this
13 Council. In many cases, these public servants and
14 their staffs climbed stairs, knocked on doors,
15 distributed meals, provided language services, and
16 took on other tasks, alongside the NYCHA staff
17 members and community volunteers who worked around
18 the clock during this time of need to serve the
19 families in public housing.

20 Today, I will give you an overview
21 of our efforts to prepare for the hurricane and to
22 respond to its unprecedented devastation and our
23 ongoing recovery efforts.

24 NYCHA's storm awareness and
25 preparedness efforts far predate Hurricane Sandy,

1
2 and even Hurricane Irene, which hit New York in
3 August 2011. NYCHA has had a hurricane procedure
4 since September 1964. We've exercised that
5 procedure as necessary and regularly updated it,
6 most recently in 2012.

7 Supporting the Bloomberg
8 administration's focus on mitigating the effects
9 of climate change, NYCHA employees began to
10 systematically engage residents and staff from
11 developments in low-lying neighborhoods.
12 Realizing that we could begin to see bigger, more
13 frequent storms, we urged these residents to
14 partner with us by participating in education
15 efforts.

16 Eight months before Hurricane
17 Irene, we initiated an emergency preparedness
18 program under the leadership of NYCHA Commissioner
19 Margarita Lopez. Over 800 residents and 150 NYCHA
20 employees participated in this program. The
21 program was focused on the Far Rockaways, given
22 their unique vulnerability to coastal storms and
23 remoteness from the rest of the City. We engaged
24 all residents, including seniors, the mobility-
25 impaired, and residents depending on life-

sustaining equipment.

During this outreach effort, we emphasized that residents should evacuate well before the storm hit if they could, and not wait until transportation was provided by NYCHA or any other governmental entity. We noted that evacuation was important not simply because of flooding, but also because of the possibility of prolonged electrical, heat, or hot water outages.

In the lead-up to Sandy, we implemented many measures based on lessons learned from Irene. These measures included having a broader base of NYCHA Departments at our Emergency Operations Center; developing pre-approved templates for flyers and other communications in various languages to facilitate sharing evacuation information; establishing pre-determined fallback sites for evacuated staff; more effectively coordinate our pre and post-storm transportation and evacuation efforts with the Department of Education, the MTA, NYPD, and other partners; and de-energizing elevators and other critical equipment in advance of the storm's impact.

In 2011, many people, including

residents, considered taking the elevators offline extreme. We now know that doing so significantly enhanced our recovery efforts.

NYCHA's communication with OEM began as early as Tuesday, October 23rd, and continued until OEM's situation room closed. NYCHA was one of the first to staff a desk at OEM and one of the last to depart on November 30th. On Thursday, October 25th, the city activated its Coastal Storm Plan. NYCHA immediately began to implement its hurricane preparedness procedures. We activated our Emergency Operations Center on Friday and it remained staffed around the clock throughout our response.

NYCHA's Chairman, John Rhea, was at OEM, and was actively engaged in daily briefings with the Mayor, deputy mayors, and fellow agency heads, along with myself and other senior staff. When the Mayor issued his voluntary evacuation order, we launched a multifaceted outreach campaign to NYCHA residents and other partners that lasted throughout the weekend and until Sandy hit land.

While our outreach efforts included

1
2 all NYCHA residents in Zone A, we prioritized
3 outreach to the almost 3,300 residents in those
4 areas who are mobility impaired and the 140 who
5 depend on life-sustaining equipment. Now, this
6 process is a completely voluntary process. These
7 individuals have identified themselves to us
8 through our annual review process as potentially
9 needing assistance. As NYCHA is not permitted to
10 require residents to identify any special needs,
11 there may have been others potentially in this
12 category.

13 Using our database of contact
14 information for these residents, NYCHA employees
15 knocked on each of their doors over the weekend,
16 as well as the doors of seniors in Zone A. We
17 offered these residents special transportation
18 options for evacuation, and reminded those who
19 insisted on sheltering-in-place to have food,
20 water, and other important supplies. We also
21 deployed an additional round of direct calls to
22 the residents who use life-sustaining equipment,
23 encouraging-them to evacuate. We noted that
24 flooding was not the only peril of the storm, that
25 prolonged electrical or heat outages were also

possible.

We began our broader outreach by contacting resident association leaders for the developments in Zone A flood areas. NYCHA Board Members led a team of NYCHA employees to hold meetings with local elected officials and resident leaders. Over the weekend, we deployed three rounds of automated calls, 33,000 in total, in order to reach each of the 19,000 families in Zone A. We also posted multi-language flyers in building lobbies, hallways, and elevators and posted messages on our websites. We coordinated with City Hall to broadly spread the same information through OEM contacts, 311 and various social media outlets, including Facebook and Twitter.

On Sunday, the 28th, we redoubled our efforts, as the Mayor changed the city's evacuation order from voluntary to mandatory. By this time, we had deployed 3,900 employees on the ground, 1,700 more staff than would usually be deployed on a Sunday. We made more calls to residents as we knocked on more resident doors.

We coordinated with the NYPD, who

1
2 made announcements over loud speakers in most
3 developments, reaching thousands more residents.
4 We coordinated with elected officials and the
5 Mayor's staff to reach even more residents. We
6 also partnered with the Department of Education to
7 provide more buses for evacuation.

8 Finally, despite Sunday's
9 evacuation deadline, as an added measure, we
10 worked with the NYPD Housing Bureau Chief Joanne
11 Jaffe to make additional buses available through
12 Monday. Our employees worked to make residents
13 aware of this final evacuation option until 2:30
14 PM that day, six hours before the worst of the
15 storm. At this point, the last willing residents
16 evacuated vulnerable developments, along with any
17 remaining NYCHA staff.

18 Despite sustained outreach from
19 NYCHA, the work of the Mayor and his staff at City
20 Hall, the efforts of local elected officials, the
21 encouragement of the NYPD and various other city
22 agencies, many residents chose not to evacuate.

23 While conducting this broad
24 engagement effort, NYCHA also moved proactively to
25 secure and prepare our buildings, construction

1 sites and critical systems in the most vulnerable
2 areas. While our preparation efforts began before
3 the storm, we started executing this plan on
4 Friday and continued throughout the weekend.

5
6 In Zone A developments, we removed
7 397 elevators from service in 201 buildings,
8 positioning them on upper floors. We de-energized
9 other related relevant equipment. Where we could,
10 we turned off the boilers and related equipment.
11 These steps were taken not only to protect
12 equipment from flooding, but also to ensure that
13 it could readily be restored after the storm.

14 Our employees checked for debris on
15 the grounds and roofs of our 2,600 buildings.
16 They also made sure that hundreds of drains were
17 cleaned and clear of potential blockages. We
18 moved NYCHA vehicles from Zone A developments to
19 safer areas. We secured 55 construction sites.
20 And finally, we inspected over 22 miles of
21 sidewalk shedding to ensure their continued
22 safety.

23 As many residents evacuated as
24 possible, with the developments secured, and with
25 our staff evacuated from Zone A, we turned to our

1
2 planned response to the impending storm. We
3 recognized the need for teams on the ground
4 immediately following the storm. Over 1,800
5 employees volunteered to spend Monday night at
6 nearby developments, despite their
7 responsibilities to their own families during this
8 trying time.

9 Sandy reached the city on the
10 evening of Monday, October 29th, causing massive
11 damage. Not one of our buildings collapsed or
12 sustained material structural damage due to the
13 storm.

14 However, as we now know, the
15 storm's reach was much wider than Zone A,
16 affecting developments in Zone B and beyond. We
17 discovered after an immediate review that over 400
18 buildings in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan,
19 housing roughly 80,000 residents, were affected
20 significantly by Sandy. Of those 423 buildings,
21 402 lost power and with it elevator and compactor
22 services; 386 buildings lost heat and hot water.

23 When combined with the storm's
24 impact to the infrastructure of Con Ed and LIPA,
25 the storm's impacts to NYCHA facilities in the

1
2 Rockaways, Coney Island, and Red Hook was
3 especially severe. In Coney Island, 42 buildings,
4 home to 8,882 residents, were impacted. In the
5 Rockaways, 60 buildings, home to 10,100 residents,
6 were impacted, and in Red Hook, 32 buildings, home
7 to 6,173 residents, were impacted.

8 It should be noted that the
9 recovery in Coney Island was especially difficult
10 because those buildings sustained substantial sand
11 and saltwater infiltration. The systems damage in
12 other communities was due mostly to flooding. In
13 addition, electricity was down at our headquarters
14 offices in Lower Manhattan. Due to good planning,
15 our emergency operations center was located in
16 Long Island City.

17 Given our primary mission as a
18 landlord, we focused on assessing the damage to
19 our buildings and building systems and determining
20 what was needed to restore services to our
21 residents. On Tuesday, October 30th, NYCHA began
22 the structural, mechanical, and electrical
23 assessment process. Over three days, an average
24 of 150 employees determined whether each building
25 was structurally sound, and confirmed the extent

1
2 of any damage. The assessments began with all
3 developments with known outages and flooding and
4 ultimately extended to all of our buildings.

5 We found sand piled against
6 basements doors up to 4 feet high, basements
7 flooded with saltwater, in some cases up to and
8 exceeding 20 feet deep, boilers and electrical
9 panels completely submerged in corrosive
10 saltwater, 30 foot long external trash compactor
11 lifted and placed into new locations, hundreds of
12 trees uprooted and lying on their side, thousands
13 of broken branches beside them, vehicles piled in
14 corners in parking lots, and in the evening,
15 complete darkness.

16 Some photos here, first of Hammel
17 Houses Community Center, where the force of the
18 water or the pressure change, the wind completely
19 blew out glass panel walls.

20 In addition, we have a photo here
21 of the meter room in one of the basements in
22 Hammel Houses. If you look closely, you can see
23 the water line completely above the electrical
24 panels that serve electricity for the buildings.

25 Then finally, we have one of our

1
2 older boiler rooms at O'Dwyer. If you can
3 imagine, this very large and complex equipment
4 completely submerged with water.

5 It was immediately clear, that in
6 order to restore electrical power, heat, and hot
7 water to these buildings, we needed to de-water
8 millions of cubic feet of space. We immediately
9 began to pump tens of millions of gallons of water
10 from electric meter rooms, gas meter rooms, boiler
11 rooms, hot water tank rooms, storage rooms,
12 elevator pits, vaults, trades shops, maintenance
13 areas, locker rooms, lunch rooms, bathrooms,
14 compactor rooms and other basement spaces. We
15 used hundreds of pumps of various capacities.

16 In some cases, we completely
17 emptied rooms of water and readied it for
18 electrical or boiler work, only to return later
19 and find the room full of water again.

20 Ultimately, we supplemented our pumping capability
21 with equipment and manpower from our heroes in
22 Onondaga County, New York, and emergency
23 contractors, Army Corps of Engineers and the Navy.

24 While we were pumping water, we
25 were working to secure temporary boilers and

1
2 generators, focusing locally first then extending
3 our search to more distant locations. We also had
4 to ensure that the mobile boiler would work with
5 NYCHA's infrastructure: low pressure versus high
6 pressure or be appropriately sized, the right
7 horsepower. In the end, we utilized 24 temporary
8 boilers, both high and low pressure, and
9 approximately 100 generators to restore heat and
10 electricity to NYCHA facilities.

11 We worked with a range of partners
12 to secure this equipment, including OEM, the Army
13 Corps of Engineers, HUD, FEMA, the National Guard,
14 LIPA and private companies. The generators came
15 from around the country and the mobile boilers
16 came from Texas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Ohio,
17 Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia. Due to
18 permitting issues, weight restrictions, and
19 trouble navigating the recently devastated tri-
20 state area, the deliveries faced numerous
21 obstacles.

22 But even before the boilers
23 arrived, we deployed numerous electricians,
24 plumbers, welders, and steamfitters to install the
25 necessary connections to the buildings: the steam

1
2 lines to the headers, electric lines, gas lines,
3 oil lines, feed water lines, all to shorten the
4 installation time, basically building an outside
5 boiler room. Once the boilers arrived, the
6 installation process was much quicker.

7 Thanks to these persistent, around-
8 the-clock efforts, we had restored heat, hot
9 water, and electricity to 44,000 affected
10 residents by November 7th, the end of the first
11 week after the storm, and 65,000 by November 14th,
12 the end of the second week.

13 By November 18th, before any other
14 landlords in the city, electrical, heat and hot
15 water services were restored to all NYCHA
16 buildings. Driving through the Rockaways one
17 night on Rockaway Beach Boulevard, I looked back
18 at our developments and it hit me, the only light
19 I saw was the light coming from Hammel Houses.

20 I must acknowledge the work of our
21 NYCHA employees, our city, state and federal
22 colleagues, and our contractors for making this
23 happen.

24 This sense of dedication and common
25 purpose also fueled our post-storm resident

1
2 outreach efforts, which were occurring at the same
3 time as the service restorations I've described,
4 We knew, drawing on our past experience with
5 Irene, that this would require a collaborative
6 effort with a wide range of partners from the
7 public, private, and nonprofit sectors, not to
8 mention the informal neighbor-to-neighbor bonds
9 that have always made our communities strong.

10 Beginning on Tuesday evening,
11 October 30th, Chairman Rhea, together with City
12 Hall and our fellow city agencies, began to
13 rollout plans to provide critical services to
14 residents who had decided to shelter in place. At
15 the same time, Vice Chair Emily Youssouf played an
16 instrumental role in coordinating resource efforts
17 with FEMA and other partners. She, together with
18 Board Member Lopez and Board Member Victor
19 Gonzalez, also led multiple briefings with NYCHA
20 resident leaders. Additionally, NYCHA employees
21 convened a series of post-storm conference calls
22 with local elected officials.

23 We continued our robust outreach
24 effort to residents with special needs, during the
25 two days immediately following the storm and

periodically thereafter. Additionally, we posted security guards at our senior developments that had lost power.

On the ground, staff coordinated and organized our collaborations with a range of partners and volunteers. Through these efforts, and in concert with many local elected officials, we began distributing food and water to residents on Thursday, November 1st. Collaborators in this effort included Bed, Bath and Beyond, Target, Walmart, New York Cares, GOYA, JetBlue, Red Hook Initiative, Fairway, Robin Hood, Shake Shack, and others.

Critical to this effort was our coordination of several large-scale door-knocking campaigns in Coney Island, the Rockaways, and the Red Hook area. Sending teams of NYCHA staff from across the Authority, along with partners from the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, Medical Mobile Vans, Community Solutions, East River Development Alliance, and home aide and health attendant agencies to distribute food, water, and blankets, and connect residents to critical health services.

NYCHA also opened our facilities to

1
2 respond to immediate community needs, opening
3 community centers to house a displaced school,
4 warming centers, medical clinics, and distribution
5 sites for food and water. On the Lower East Side,
6 along with a host of elected officials, and the
7 Legal Aid Society, we set up legal clinics at
8 Rutgers Houses and Campos Plaza to help residents
9 secure FEMA aid.

10 The engagement of members of this
11 body were especially helpful. Speaker Quinn and
12 her office, along with Congresswoman Nydia
13 Velasquez and State Senator Velmanette Montgomery
14 helped to connect us with community groups,
15 especially in Red Hook, that coordinated efforts
16 more swiftly than government is often able to.

17 Chairwoman Mendez lent NYCHA
18 several capable members of her staff and was
19 tireless in her efforts on behalf of residents
20 with special needs on the Lower East Side.

21 My Councilmember Margaret Chin and
22 her staff canvassed Smith Houses and other
23 developments to ensure that residents were safe.

24 Councilmember Dominic Recchia was
25 instrumental in helping us secure access to

doctors, ambulances, and other resources.

Councilmember Steve Levin and his staff worked practically full-time out of Gowanus Houses after the storm to distribute meals and clothing, staying in constant contact with both residents and NYCHA staff.

Councilmember Sara Gonzalez personally knocked on doors in the developments in her district after the storm to check in on residents.

Assembly Member Felix Ortiz organized an extensive health clinic at the Miccio Center.

And these are just examples of the contributions.

We know that despite this work and partnership, Sandy's aftermath will be with us for a long time to come. Having restored critical services and power, NYCHA has set about inspecting, cleaning, and remediating individual apartments and public spaces such as community centers and offices. We have also knocked on the doors of nearly 24,000 apartments to check for Sandy-related mold. We did not locate significant

1
2 Sandy related mold, however, where we encountered
3 any mold conditions, we removed it. Even where
4 the mold conditions were the result of
5 housekeeping issues, we removed it.

6 We are continuing our in-depth
7 assessment of those apartments and public areas
8 directly affected by storm waters. We are
9 especially committed to working with residents
10 displaced by the storm to identify temporary
11 housing solutions while their apartments are
12 cleaned and repaired. In some cases, we have
13 offered a temporary or permanent transfer to
14 residents in impacted apartments. NYCHA's staff
15 is providing crucial support services as part of
16 our work to coordinate relocations for residents.

17 Our Board approved and we've begun
18 over \$5 million in rent abatements to residents in
19 households in impacted areas who lost electrical,
20 hot water, heat, and elevator services.

21 For every day without any of those
22 services, residents received a full credit. We
23 also aggressively pursued and won a \$7.3 million
24 grant from the U.S. Labor Department to hire close
25 to 400 temporary workers from affected communities

1
2 to assist with our outreach and cleanup efforts.
3 Additionally, vendors contracted to clean and
4 rehabilitate common spaces have hired an estimated
5 200 NYCHA residents.

6 NYCHA has begun a large-scale
7 assessment of our infrastructure to determine the
8 full cost of the storm to NYCHA, and, more
9 importantly, to make decisions about how, in light
10 of New York City's growing vulnerability to
11 tropical storms and other extreme weather events,
12 we can more strategically procure, locate, and
13 protect important equipment.

14 We have also increased our
15 communication to residents in affected
16 communities, based on feedback we have received.
17 We know that there is much room for improvement in
18 this area, and will continue to assess and make
19 adjustments.

20 We know, however, that there is
21 much more that needs to be done. We can only be
22 successful with the help of our partners from
23 across the city, the state, and country, including
24 our friends in the City Council. We continue to
25 work with Washington, Albany, and City Hall to

1
2 obtain funding to address our most pressing
3 challenges, and have worked with many members of
4 this body on behalf of affected New Yorkers.

5 We began 2012 by releasing Plan
6 NYCHA, highlighting the need for citizens from
7 every walk of life to invest in preserving the
8 great promise of public housing. That need has
9 never been more evident than it is today. We are
10 confident that with the continued benefit of your
11 ideas and assistance we can go forward and finish
12 the work that remains.

13 Thank you and I'm happy to answer
14 any questions that you may have.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
16 I'd like to take a moment to introduce all the
17 Council Members who are here today. To my far
18 right, Council Member Sara Gonzalez from Brooklyn,
19 Melissa Mark-Viverito from Manhattan, Council
20 Member Halloran from Queens. Behind me we have
21 Council Member Levin from Brooklyn, Council Member
22 Recchia, also the chair of our Finance Committee,
23 from Brooklyn, and Council Member Gale Brewer from
24 Manhattan. My Speaker and Council Member Arroyo
25 from Brooklyn, Council Member Lander from Brooklyn

and Council Member--

[Background noise]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Excuse me.

SPEAKER QUINN: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's where
the Yankees are at, in Brooklyn, right? No.
Excuse me.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Once I
become the borough president, they'll be there.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
Arroyo from the Bronx.

SPEAKER QUINN: Yay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yay. That's
because I was getting ahead of myself. Council
Member Lander is from Brooklyn, who is right next
to her. Council Member Chin, who is from
Manhattan. To my colleagues--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] Do
you get the guys behind us?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes, I did.

SPEAKER QUINN: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I have a list
of people who want to ask questions, so if you
haven't gotten me your name, but I'm also going to

1
2 allow those Council Members that had flooding in
3 their districts to ask questions first. Now, I
4 turn it over to my Speaker, Christine Quinn.

5 SPEAKER QUINN: Thank you very
6 much. Let's talk a little bit, starting first
7 just with, you talked about, I guess, the 150
8 staff--is that what you said--that were deployed
9 to do immediate work right away, kind of
10 assessment. Is that the right number?

11 CECIL HOUSE: That's correct.

12 SPEAKER QUINN: One hundred fifty
13 out of what potential number?

14 CECIL HOUSE: You needed particular
15 capabilities.

16 SPEAKER QUINN: Right. Just in the
17 universe of guys and gals who could have done it,
18 what was--

19 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Right,
20 that was the universe that we had available to do
21 that.

22 SPEAKER QUINN: So that was the
23 total number.

24 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

25 SPEAKER QUINN: Okay. How quickly

1
2 did it become clear to you that the assessments
3 that were being done--and I don't mean this
4 disrespectfully to those who were doing them--may
5 not have been accurate and perhaps you needed
6 other staff to come in who had different types of
7 experience to help you? Because as I understand
8 it, for example in Red Hook, the water was pumped,
9 and as Council Member Gonzalez has informed me,
10 the water was back in the morning, and you even
11 made reference to that.

12 CECIL HOUSE: Correct.

13 SPEAKER QUINN: And as I understand
14 it in the case of Red Hook, from Sara, that
15 continued for many days, until I was informed by
16 NYCHA that in fact the reason you thought the
17 water was coming back up was not the reason the
18 water was coming back up and you had to switch
19 gears.

20 So it seems to me, and I only use
21 Red Hook as an example, but I heard numerous bits
22 of information during the process of--and look, I
23 suspect this is going to happen--we went down path
24 A based on technical decisions, when we really
25 needed to be on path B or C. I think of the--I'm

1
2 making this number up--300 times you had to make
3 that decision, it's no surprise that some of those
4 would have ended up that way.

5 But it seemed to me there were many
6 decisions that ended up that way. It seemed to me
7 that we may just have needed earlier to engage the
8 exact type of consultants, Navy, et cetera, that
9 you engaged later on, because the staff we had,
10 this is not what they do, so how would they know
11 how to figure it out. So how long did you take
12 before you brought in outside help of a bigger
13 degree, bigger scope or a more technical scope?
14 Because that, to me, is a key thing in the
15 analysis here of in hindsight how much time did we
16 almost waste by not being able to more quickly
17 figure out the nature and the depth of the
18 problems.

19 CECIL HOUSE: So the premise that
20 we were getting bad information on the issues and
21 that we didn't have the right qualified
22 individuals, I guess I have to question that. I
23 do think that the people that we had doing these
24 assessments were qualified to do the assessments.

25 The example that you mentioned in

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Red Hook, you know, there--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] I
could give you others.

CECIL HOUSE: I'm sure.

SPEAKER QUINN: Fulton Houses.

CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

SPEAKER QUINN: I was told x and y
about the power. I was told the power would be
back on at x time. Then I was told, then when
that didn't happen, because God knows, you know, I
had somebody standing there at Fulton House to
find out at that hour if the power went back on.
It did not. Then I was told whoever told me that
was completely erroneous information, that Fulton
is, in fact, a steam situation. Then I was told
the steam would be at capacity by x. When at x
there was not power, I was told that was
inaccurate, that steam would take at least y
amount of time to come back up.

Look, steam takes what it takes,
because then I engaged my outside consultant, my
father, an electrical engineer, who at great
detail explained to me steam systems, having
worked briefly for Con Ed himself. It was going

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

to take a long time.

My point is not that Fulton House, for example, is steam and that that takes a long time. My problem is immediately being told twice wrong information, which we then disseminated to Fulton House, to try to be of assistance, and it was just wrong. I don't want to go through each one, but I have those same stories from at least five different, if not six developments.

I say this with no disrespect to the staff, because why would we have staff on payroll who know how to deal with this level of destruction. It doesn't make any sense. That's not what they do every day. Why did it take us so long to bring in others who do, A, and B, are we now going to have kind of emergency contractors/consultants on staff so the next time, God forbid, we can bring them in earlier, quicker?

CECIL HOUSE: So I think the issue there is the quality of the information that was getting to your specific location. Because our--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] Well I worked the location.

CECIL HOUSE: Okay, but at our

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

command center--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] I was at the command center.

CECIL HOUSE: No, at the NYCHA--

SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] I was at OEM at my Council desk, which is directly across from the NYCHA desk.

CECIL HOUSE: But at the NYCHA emergency operations center in Long Island City, where we were monitoring the situation. So the driver for the steam coming back was determined by Con Ed. So the information that you were getting around steam would have been information that we were getting from Con Ed. If that proved to be incorrect, then we'd have to go back to Con Ed.

SPEAKER QUINN: Well, but let--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] The information around Red Hook was there were multiple issues. So the assumption that there's only one--my concern is that in a lot of cases there were multiple answers.

SPEAKER QUINN: But can I ask you a question? Are you breaking down--and just so you know, on the Fulton House situation, myself and

1
2 the folks from NYCHA went over to the Con Ed desk,
3 and this is going to shock you, but we had a
4 three-way conversation there.

5 CECIL HOUSE: Good.

6 SPEAKER QUINN: Not so great if we
7 were to debrief it for either Con Ed or for NYCHA.
8 But are we able to go back through each
9 development and figure out what the problem was,
10 when we thought it was x and when we knew it was y
11 and what enabled us to figure out it was y, not in
12 a punitive sense.

13 CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

14 SPEAKER QUINN: But in a sense of
15 figuring out who and what we need to keep on
16 retainer.

17 CECIL HOUSE: Yes.

18 SPEAKER QUINN: So in the future,
19 God forbid, we have that. I don't fault the
20 workers that they kept pumping out water and water
21 kept coming in the next day at Red Hook, and they
22 kept pumping it out. They kept pumping it out,
23 good for them. They needed somebody else to tell
24 them that it was in part related, as I understand
25 you, to the water table there and that it was

1
2 coming up through the bottom through cracks, et
3 cetera. So they could have kept pumping water
4 until the cows came home and it was going to keep
5 coming up.

6 So how do we have staff on a
7 contract that can answer that?

8 CECIL HOUSE: So, in--

9 SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing]
10 Moving forward in the debrief? And you're right,
11 I don't want to get lost too much in the weeds of
12 each development. Are you guys able to do that
13 analysis? When you complete it, will you share it
14 with us or do you need approval from City Hall?

15 CECIL HOUSE: So we are in the
16 process of doing a full after action report and
17 developing--

18 SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] And
19 what's your sense of timing on finishing it?

20 CECIL HOUSE: --lessons learned.
21 We actually have drafts that we're working on now.

22 SPEAKER QUINN: Oh, great.

23 CECIL HOUSE: So, actually, it
24 shouldn't be too long.

25 SPEAKER QUINN: Oh, great, great.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Then we'll be able to get a copy of it and do a hearing?

CECIL HOUSE: Absolutely.

SPEAKER QUINN: Terrific. Great.

CECIL HOUSE: Absolutely.

SPEAKER QUINN: When were the generators, and electrical panels and exterior boilers, or whatever the right word is for them, you know the big outside ones, when were they ordered?

CECIL HOUSE: So right after the storm, the very first reports back that we were getting, the day after the storm, acknowledged that the boiler rooms were submerged and that the boilers, more likely than not, would not operate. So we started looking for temporary boilers right away.

SPEAKER QUINN: Great, okay. So that would be like whatever the day, Wednesday.

CECIL HOUSE: Right, absolutely.

SPEAKER QUINN: Okay. That's important, because we had heard other information and I wanted to clarify--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Right.

1
2 SPEAKER QUINN: --that the
3 Authority had not ordered the things that were
4 needed until much further down.

5 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

6 SPEAKER QUINN: So just restate
7 that, Mr. House.

8 CECIL HOUSE: The prior information
9 that you heard related to when we actually reached
10 a successful vendor. But--

11 SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] Well
12 that's--

13 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Right.
14 On Wednesday, we started searching for boilers
15 here in the New York metropolitan area. They were
16 closer; they'd be quicker to get to. We have
17 particular needs. There were no boilers available
18 locally that would meet our needs. So we extended
19 our search. We looked more broadly, trying to
20 stay within proximity to the city. As we extended
21 our search, it took us a few days to make those
22 contacts, make those connections and to have the
23 potential suppliers of those boilers actually
24 begin to identify whether they had potential
25 boilers or not. We locked them down, the first

1
2 vendor that actually had available equipment, we
3 identified on Friday.

4 SPEAKER QUINN: Great. That's
5 useful. I can attest, having been at OEM with you
6 and other staff, just how--not just for NYCHA--
7 just how challenging it was to find generators--

8 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Right.

9 SPEAKER QUINN: --because the
10 entire tri-state region was--

11 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

12 SPEAKER QUINN: --searching for
13 them. Just one last question and then I'll turn
14 it back over to the Chair. Talk a little bit
15 about sand, if you will, right, because the degree
16 to which sand in the elevators, et cetera, and the
17 problem that that was, which was obviously, I
18 think, probably something we've never encountered
19 before. What do we need to do moving forward to
20 prevent something like that from happening again,
21 because many of the developments are that close to
22 the beach?

23 CECIL HOUSE: Right. Well, we
24 don't have definitive solutions defined yet, but
25 we are looking at a series of options. The key

1
2 issue for us, and this primarily affected us in
3 Coney Island. So in the Rockaways and in Red
4 Hook, it was mostly the saltwater. The key issue
5 was the sand, the grit from the sand had an
6 additional impact on our equipment and there was
7 an additional remediation requirement with that
8 sand as we move forward.

9 So we will be looking at--as we
10 will in all of the locations--whether we need to
11 relocate our equipment or otherwise protect our
12 equipment from those elements in the future.

13 SPEAKER QUINN: That's a
14 conversation we'd obviously very much want to be a
15 part of because it coincides with our other
16 broader Sandy work. Let me just ask a question I
17 asked Deputy Mayor Hallowell yesterday. If you
18 were to go back and do it over, what were the one,
19 two things you would do differently? Not you
20 personally, but you would have the Authority do
21 differently?

22 CECIL HOUSE: You know, we are in
23 the process right now of actually making those
24 decisions and those determinations. I mean,
25 through this "lessons learned" process we are

1 assessing all of our employees. We are going to
2 be working with the partners that we actually
3 worked with to come up with an actual list that we
4 intend to actually implement. I mean, one of the
5 things, as I noted in my testimony, you know after
6 the storm, the communication component with our
7 residents, especially around the status of the
8 buildings, I think we could have done a better
9 job.
10

11 SPEAKER QUINN: I want to
12 reiterate, for me, and this is not to minimize any
13 other aspect of it, but for me the thing that was
14 most frustrating was how challenging it seemed to
15 get an accurate picture, not even from a
16 communication perspective, that is another level,
17 but just from a kind of mechanical perspective of
18 what was wrong. So I really want to urge you to
19 look at that, because, to me, that was where time
20 which was crucial, because people are without heat
21 and hot water, and also crucial because all of the
22 supplies and whatnot were getting gobbled up.
23 That, to me, is the biggest problem. How do we
24 better engage consultants, et cetera, to be on
25 call to help us with that?

1
2 I mean, think of the great
3 resources we have in things like the Real Estate
4 Board of New York who run and build and manage
5 other high rises who have exactly these kind of
6 people on their staff on a regular basis. I
7 wondered at times why we weren't having them out
8 there at our various developments, telling us what
9 the problems were, with their mechanics. That, to
10 me, is where we need to go back, and that's the
11 beginning of where the clock began to become too
12 long. So, thank you, Madame Chair.

13 CECIL HOUSE: If I could, just on
14 that point? I think one of the challenges that we
15 had early on with making that determination was
16 that this equipment was completely submerged under
17 water for a couple of days. So if I were doing
18 this over again, you know one of the early things,
19 I think that we've missed the impact of de-
20 watering. And so, having larger pumps--

21 SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] Are
22 you saying you made an assumption that when you
23 de-watered it would be working or you didn't have
24 big enough pumps to do the de-watering?

25 CECIL HOUSE: Right. Having bigger

1 pumps to de-water gets the water out of the way so
2 you can make a better assessment of the actual
3 conditions. We did have facilities that came back
4 online when we removed the water and then others
5 that are still out did not.
6

7 SPEAKER QUINN: Probably in part,
8 the longer they were submerged, the worse they
9 got, you know, as well.

10 CECIL HOUSE: That was a factor.

11 SPEAKER QUINN: Let me just ask, as
12 one other question, do we have a complete kind of
13 inventory within NYCHA of exactly what type of
14 machinery is in each building, in each
15 development, how old it is, when it was last
16 serviced, all that kind of information? Was that
17 information pulled during Sandy? Because I would
18 assume there are experts out there who could, not
19 to the pinpoint, but tell you, you know, if an x-
20 year-old boiler of an xyz variety was under water
21 for an hour, it's done. Do we have all of that
22 material that we can access easily?

23 CECIL HOUSE: Well, we have the
24 material. Accessing easily is the question. So
25 having an asset management system in place is one

1
2 of the things that we will have on our lessons
3 learned.

4 SPEAKER QUINN: I think that's
5 really important. That was certainly my sense is
6 that we were not able to access that information
7 in an easy, timely manner, and that it really
8 hindered our efforts not knowing that. That would
9 have, perhaps, sped things up or made what you
10 needed clearer.

11 CECIL HOUSE: We would have wanted
12 the information quicker.

13 SPEAKER QUINN: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I'm going to
15 turn it over to Council Member Chin, to be
16 followed by Council Member Gonzalez.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you,
18 Madame Chair. Good afternoon. I think we had a
19 brief meeting with Council Member Mendez and a
20 couple other Council Members, with Chairman
21 Recchia, after Hurricane Sandy, and I think we
22 tied to sum up some of the lessons that we
23 learned. I think, looking back, this time around,
24 during Hurricane Irene, in the Smith Houses, we
25 did a 95 percent evacuation rate. It was

1
2 tremendous. Everybody was like very supportive,
3 helpful, all the elected in Lower Manhattan worked
4 together.

5 But this time around, we had so
6 much trouble asking people to evacuate because
7 they looked at us and said, well, last time we did
8 and we were okay. This time, we're not leaving.
9 I remember, you know, listening back from staff,
10 yeah, we knock on doors but people don't want to
11 leave. It was really, really difficult. I think
12 that sheltering in place, how do we sort of
13 prepare for that and make sure to let people know
14 if you're not going to leave then you have to do
15 x, y and z. Do you have enough batteries? Or do
16 you have enough food at home? Make sure you fill
17 up your bathtub with water.

18 Even though only Smith Houses was
19 in Zone A, this time around all the other
20 development was affected. So people might have
21 evacuated to their friends in Vladeck or at
22 Rutgers. They didn't have electricity. One of
23 the hardest hit was not so much the elevator was
24 out but also people had no water, because waters
25 were not able to pumped up.

1
2 I mean the problem was so huge that
3 it was very hard to try to tackle. One of the
4 things that I think we've learned from this, and
5 hopefully NYCHA will really pay attention to
6 helping the TA presidents and the TA organization
7 to really have the resources and the tools to
8 really help do the education and do the
9 organizing.

10 I remember that day that we were
11 preparing to help with the evacuation. It was so
12 rushed. We didn't have enough time. It was
13 Sunday afternoon that we were having the final
14 meeting and the subway was going to stop running
15 at 7. People didn't have enough time to knock on
16 doors, but also, I don't think that NYCHA had,
17 like--it really should be every development that
18 we should have lists for each building, who are he
19 seniors, vulnerable population, so that when we go
20 and knock on those doors, we can check off who has
21 left and who's still here. So that in the
22 aftermath, when we have to deliver the food and
23 the water, that we were able at least to reach
24 people who really needed the help. That was not
25 available.

1
2 Some management, you know some of
3 the managers had the information. It took a while
4 for us to get it during the aftermath. That was
5 helpful because you know who the vulnerable people
6 are, to make sure they got the food and the hot
7 water, I mean and the water, especially when
8 you're working with Meals on Wheels that the
9 seniors were able to get the food supply that they
10 need.

11 So I think in the long run, NYCHA
12 really needs to look at systematically how to help
13 the tenant leader and also with local elected
14 officials and the partners in the community, the
15 local community-based organization so that we can
16 work together with information when we go and
17 knock on those doors. That is one of the
18 suggestions that we have.

19 The other issue was really looking
20 at investing in our community centers, because
21 this time around I think the community center down
22 in my part of the district was so significant.
23 Rutgers was a distribution center. I mean we were
24 able to get the water and the food from the
25 National Guard and volunteers came in there and

1
2 they got dispersed out throughout NYCHA
3 development and the community. The same thing
4 with the community center at Smith, Hamilton
5 Madison Houses, they were the warming center.
6 They were the food distribution center. They
7 also--

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
9 Council Member Chin?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yes?

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Let me
12 interject and just ask the question. Can you
13 please explain to us how you engage your resident
14 leaders, how you engage other leaders of the
15 community, how you worked with elected officials
16 and how that differed from development to
17 development? Can you please tell us that please?

18 CECIL HOUSE: Sure. In the pre-
19 storm preparation, one of the first things that we
20 did in our outreach program was to reach out to
21 the tenant leaders. We got varying responses from
22 the tenant leaders across the developments. Some
23 developments, based upon their own experience, saw
24 the impending storm as significant and severe and
25 acted accordingly. In other places, perhaps

1
2 because of their experience with Irene--I don't
3 want to speculate--there was a different view of
4 the potential consequences of the storm. But we
5 clearly saw--

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
7 You reached out to ever tenant association in the
8 26 buildings that are in Zone A, is that correct?

9 CECIL HOUSE: Definitely.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Did you
11 reach out to other tenant associations that were
12 in Zone B, or you just were in the Zone A?

13 CECIL HOUSE: We communicated
14 broadly across the city regarding the storm.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Right.

16 CECIL HOUSE: But we definitely
17 communicated directly with the tenant leaders in
18 the Zone A areas.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

20 CECIL HOUSE: And we saw after the
21 storm, the developments with very strong tenant
22 associations fared better. So that is clearly an
23 asset that we can actually benefit from and
24 actually enhance as we move forward.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I think that

1 really showed because there were meetings at
2 Smith. The tenant leader held a meeting with the
3 residents way before the storms. My staff and
4 also other elected staff was involved in those
5 meetings, so that we were ready. But we didn't
6 get the mandatory evacuation order from the city,
7 so then we had to wait. But everybody was in the
8 preparation mode. Getting people to leave was
9 very difficult.
10

11 I think one of the other questions
12 that I was getting at, too, was in terms of the
13 electrical equipment, because the Council also
14 invested a lot of the camera equipment, the
15 security equipment. So what provision is NYCHA
16 going to make to protect these equipment so that
17 it doesn't get affected by the storm, because--

18 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Sure.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --we're not
20 going to be able to keep putting capital dollars
21 to replace them if they're not being protected
22 right now.

23 CECIL HOUSE: So as we look--

24 SPEAKER QUINN: [interposing] If I
25 could just jump in, if you don't mind, Council

1
2 Member, just before you ask the question, because
3 I'm going to step out of the hearings. Thank you,
4 Madame Chair. I just want to thank you. Mr.
5 House, we've been informed that we will be
6 receiving a copy of the plan in the next week or
7 so. So thank you.

8 CECIL HOUSE: Great.

9 SPEAKER QUINN: Thank you, Madame
10 Chair.

11 CECIL HOUSE: So as we look to
12 rebuilding and continuing our recovery, I mean one
13 of the key and critical decisions that we will be
14 making is how do we rebuild or repair or replace
15 some of this critical equipment. Our preference
16 will clearly be, and our focus, will be on making
17 sure that we create more resilient developments in
18 all aspects, whether it's the boilers or our
19 electrical equipment or any other equipment that
20 we have that we don't actually leave it exposed to
21 potential storms as we move forward, to the extent
22 possible.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So in terms
24 of the security cameras that's going to be put
25 into a lot of the development right now, because

1
2 Smith is getting their new security camera. So we
3 want to make sure that they're not going to be in
4 the mechanical room that was flooded.

5 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: And that they
7 will be protected.

8 CECIL HOUSE: Right. So to the
9 extent that they're in basements, we'll be looking
10 at moving them up, as we are with other equipment.
11 We may be creating mechanical rooms above ground
12 outside of those basement areas. That will give
13 us an opportunity to relocate that equipment to
14 those locations.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Then the last
16 question I have is really having supplies
17 available, storing some of the so-called MRE that
18 we got from the National Guard and water so that
19 each development will have supplies stored away
20 for emergencies rather than not having anything
21 when things like storms happen. So you've got to
22 find some space to be able to store these kind of
23 resources.

24 CECIL HOUSE: We'll work with the
25 tenant associations to work on that.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member Gonzalez, followed by Council Member Recchia and then Levin and then Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Good afternoon, how are you? Thank you, Chairs, or Chair. I have a question in respect to the deployment. In Red Hook Houses, there are 6,173 residents, I believe, 32 buildings.

You spoke earlier in your testimony about deployment of teams. Do you have an idea how many teams were deployed to Red Hook?

CECIL HOUSE: I don't have the number specifically for Red Hook right now, but I can get that for you and provide it to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Well, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Would you consider or have you considered teams within the buildings or within, let's say, east and west, so that they are trained to respond and they're within the buildings, they have already relationships with the folks there and they're trusted? So therefore, even when we step to the plate as electeds, community members,

1
2 anyone who's interested in assisting during a
3 disaster like this that they already have people
4 within the group and within the residence that
5 will understand why you have to move?

6 I mean, I was there before Sandy
7 and after. Before, to evacuate, with the bullhorn
8 and run out there and tell people how they were
9 going to lose their elevator use, how they were
10 going to lose--and a lot of folks still, as
11 Margaret Chin stated, did not believe it was going
12 to happen. So a lot of people stayed. So I think
13 CERT teams would be trained properly, if they can
14 be invested in, within the communities and that
15 definitely would benefit the residents and ensure
16 that, you know, they are not impacted negatively.

17 CECIL HOUSE: So as we're looking
18 back over the storm, we did find locations that
19 has those teams in the past. We found that those
20 teams, sort of the residual was still there and
21 they were relatively effective. So as we go
22 through our after action, that is something that's
23 already been discussed, and we will continue to
24 work on that as we go forward.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Okay,

1 well I'd like to see that moving forward. The
2 other concern I have is there was a lot of problem
3 with the lighting. Of course, there was no
4 electricity, I get that, but then hallways were
5 dangerous. It became a public safety issue. I
6 remember having conversations constantly with
7 folks that were helping, including Captain Schiff
8 [phonetic], and for a while there, there was a
9 panic and a fear in Red Hook there was a lot of
10 crime going on. But basically, there was just
11 darkness.
12

13 Is there any possibly for the
14 future that you could invest, or look to have some
15 type of battery or something that will come on at
16 least in the hallways?

17 CECIL HOUSE: So our funding
18 proposals will include a series of things like
19 that, backup generators for elevators, generators
20 or backup batteries for emergency lighting
21 throughout hallways and sensitive areas. So we
22 will be looking at that. The key for us going
23 forward will be our ability to get the funding to
24 implement those things.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Thank

1
2 you. Then in respect to folks that have
3 disabilities and seniors that live in very high
4 floors, is there any thought process for the
5 future as to how that's going to be dealt with?

6 CECIL HOUSE: Well that's one of
7 the reasons that we are considering the backup
8 generators. So with the backup generators, you
9 can actually run your elevators. So, backup
10 generators focused on critical system components
11 like elevators, emergency lights in hallways and
12 stairwells that will facilitate the evacuation
13 process and create a bit more of a secure
14 building.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Is there
16 any possibility that those companies that you
17 spoke about earlier where New York City could
18 purchase these pumps, generators, whatever, that
19 you can do some kind of layaway plan or something
20 that's going to at least secure that those
21 generators will get to us. In other words, it's
22 in the plan, can it be in the plan?

23 CECIL HOUSE: Well, the larger
24 pumps that we talked about, we think are critical
25 to our efforts going forward. So those will need

1
2 to have a high priority as we go forward. Then
3 the generators will depend on--you know, Congress
4 is currently reviewing their funding. It will
5 depend on our ability to get those things funded.
6 But we will try to implement all of those
7 solutions.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: No one
9 really knew the impact of something like this, so
10 to plan for it, I guess we have to plan for the
11 worst.

12 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: So I
14 would just suggest that in the future,
15 specifically in these houses that you have more
16 presence of NYCHA.

17 CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: I was
19 there the entire time, from evacuating to every
20 single day with my staff. As wonderful as your
21 team and those folks that we did find were there,
22 it was difficult. So I would suggest that you
23 look at that and perhaps the employees that are
24 already part of NYCHA can be ready to do that as
25 well. We needed more presence there. I had many,

1 many conversations with the chair. He was
2 incredibly wonderful every time I called. I had a
3 million questions because there was real concern,
4 and I know there was a lot of panic.

5 But I do want to say that a lot of
6 folks came together, the community came together,
7 the crime was at a level that we were incredibly
8 amazed about, but I also want to thank a lot of
9 the folks in Sunset Park because a lot of the
10 folks in Sunset Park contribute to coming down,
11 Resurrection Church. We had trucks coming from
12 all over the United States. I'm telling you--

13 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: --it was
15 an incredible thing that happened but now we now,
16 and we need to realize that lives were really
17 impacted, never mind the lives that were lost.

18 CECIL HOUSE: Yeah.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: So it is
20 important that you have more presence.

21 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: That you
23 look at the possibility of generators and boilers
24 for the future. This is what I saw, because I was
25

1
2 there. This is not something that someone told
3 me. I actually saw the need. So with all due
4 respect, we as a city need to step to the plate.
5 Thank you.

6 CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, I agree. On
7 the presence of NYCHA employees, I think we had
8 employees present in all of the developments. I
9 think they were working. I think the challenge
10 that we had was visibility and quantity. So did
11 we have enough? We had many people in the
12 basements working. Having more employees engaging
13 with the residents and being more present
14 definitely will help.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: There is
16 one more thing. Would you consider a database
17 that's updated of people with disabilities and
18 seniors that need to be accessed? Is that
19 something that you would consider in the future?

20 CECIL HOUSE: So we have a database
21 of people needing special assistance. So the way
22 it currently works is that our residents self-
23 identify that they need that assistance if they
24 have some impairment needing assistance. I think
25 the challenge that we had is that it is not--we

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

cannot mandate it and so it's not as--

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ:

[interposing] I saw some folks--and I'm sorry I'm interrupting you, because I did speak to some of you team that had the list.

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: But that list is not exactly what's happening there in the building.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: So that needs to be updated.

CECIL HOUSE: We understand and--

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ:

[interposing] There were a lot of difficulties with that.

CECIL HOUSE: We'll work with the residents to get them to identify themselves on the list. That would help.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Again, understanding, and I don't want to be redundant because a lot of folks have questions, but with the saltwater, we're A Zone, all that water that was in there, never in my entire life had I seen

1
2 that. Never mind the Red Hook Houses, because I
3 know this is what we're talking about today, but
4 even those businesses that were impacted and so on
5 and so forth. So we need to prepare those zones
6 for this kind of disaster, never mind the entire
7 city. Thank you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Thank you.
9 First, I want to start off to ask some questions
10 and saying that NYCHA did some things that were
11 good and they did some things that were not so
12 good. I want to thank the many volunteers from
13 New York City that came out and helped us on Coney
14 Island, and especially my colleagues in the City
15 Council who came out and walked up, you know, 20,
16 15 stories to deliver water and stuff.

17 I'm going to start off by asking
18 you a question. You said that Coney Island had 42
19 buildings that NYCHA was responsible for. Who was
20 in charge on the ground in Coney Island? Who was
21 the go-to? Who was the person in charge of NYCHA
22 in Coney Island?

23 CECIL HOUSE: We had our mobile
24 command center located on Surf Avenue. And it--

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

[interposing] Where on Surf Avenue?

CECIL HOUSE: It was in front of Coney Island Houses, in that parking lot right in front of those buildings. It was there pretty early on in the recovery.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I know the van was there. I'm asking who was in charge?

CECIL HOUSE: There was an assistant borough director who was--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:
[interposing] Who? I want names.

CECIL HOUSE: Leon Agare [phonetic] was there.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Is he here today?

CECIL HOUSE: I don't think so.
No.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: What was his name?

CECIL HOUSE: Leon Agare.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: He was in charge of Coney Island.

CECIL HOUSE: We had different shifts, so not around the clock. We had different

1 shifts of people manning the command center. I
2 can get you the roster.

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: No, no,
5 no. The question, maybe you didn't hear me. I'm
6 going to be clear. Who was in charge of Coney
7 Island? Not who was on shifts. Who was the
8 person responsible for these 42 buildings, the go-
9 to person in Coney Island?

10 CECIL HOUSE: So we had our command
11 center. We had it staffed. That was the location
12 that we positioned.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Okay.

14 [Background noise]

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Let's keep
16 it down. I'm going to ask you for the third time.
17 What is the name of the person in charge of Coney
18 Island, the go-to person on the floor, the go-to
19 who was there, who was responsible, who was that
20 person? You know why you can't answer the
21 question? Because there wasn't anyone responsible
22 to go to on the ground. That's the point I am
23 making. I couldn't find who was in charge, what
24 was going on in what building. Cell service was
25 out. You can't even answer who was in charge.

1
2 CECIL HOUSE: We had an assistant
3 borough director that manned our command center,
4 who was responsible for the activities in Coney
5 Island.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Is that
7 Leon? What's his last name? How do you spell his
8 last name?

9 CECIL HOUSE: Leon Agare was there.
10 He was there for most hours, but we did send him
11 home. When he went home, we had an alternate in
12 charge.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I was out
14 there every day. I couldn't even tell you what
15 this guy looks like. I kept on asking where to
16 go. Thank God, Brian Honan [phonetic] and his
17 staff, I was able to reach out. We didn't have
18 service. There was no communication. The biggest
19 problem that we had is that no one knew what was
20 going on in every building.

21 I'm glad to see my colleague, Sara
22 Gonzalez, you had people on the ground with lists,
23 who were people that needed additional help to get
24 out of their apartments. I kept on asking who has
25 this list, so we can make sure those people, if

1
2 they stayed, if they went, we could go help. No
3 one had this list.

4 So the Speaker brought up earlier
5 about evictions and in Coney Island, people got
6 served with eviction papers the day, that
7 Wednesday they were getting served. How many
8 eviction notices were served after the storm?

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
10 Recchia, when you say after the storm, you mean
11 like on October 29th?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: That
13 Tuesday or Wednesday after the storm, how many
14 eviction notices?

15 CECIL HOUSE: So between November
16 1st and December 30th, 2,629 administrative
17 termination tenancy letters were sent out.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Was that
19 in NYCHA housing affected by--

20 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] That
21 was in NYCHA. Yes, I do not have specific numbers
22 for Coney Island.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Are those
24 affected by Sandy, those NYCHA facilities, or is
25 that overall?

CECIL HOUSE: That's overall.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: How many--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]

Excuse me; let me get clarification. Termination notices, that's like the three-day or the 30-day notice, depending whether it's a holdover or nonpayment?

CECIL HOUSE: Yes, I can--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:

[interposing] That's for an administrative hearing, not for housing.

CECIL HOUSE: I can break those down: 11,163--I'm sorry--1,163 were first-time notices; 493 were adjournment letters; 922 were amended charges; and 54 were re-opened defaults.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And marshal's notices?

CECIL HOUSE: The Law Department did not take any action, default terminations hearing or inquests against people residing in the Sandy impacted areas, and we've continued to refrain from taking any action throughout the moratorium period.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: When--

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]

The moratorium period, did he say that for the record, was?

CECIL HOUSE: We implemented it November 15th, but effective prior to that, through February 1st.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: February 1st.

CECIL HOUSE: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Is there any way to get that extended later than February 1st? I mean, there are still people in my district who are trying to get their lives back together.

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, that's something that we--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:
[interposing] I'm just saying, you know, first of all, I think that this should have--someone should have said let's put a stop on this. We had meetings. You were there when you told the residents, you know, about the January reduction, that you had to show that. I understand that. But I just think it was poor judgment on whoever

1
2 made the decision to end out eviction notices or
3 any type of notice. These people were devastated.
4 They lost everything.

5 CECIL HOUSE: I think the notices
6 that were delivered in the Sandy area were
7 initiated prior to the storm and we were not able
8 to recall them.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: The two
10 complexes I just want to talk about is Coney
11 Island Houses and Gravesend Houses. Coney Island
12 Houses, I think they got hit the worst in Coney
13 Island. They're right on the water. That's where
14 a lot of the sand came in.

15 I just need to know what is going
16 to be the process to rebuilding them up. Right
17 now, all my facilities in Coney Island, we have
18 the boilers outside.

19 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I believe
21 they're going to stay there until sometime in
22 2014. I'm glad that you were very open and honest
23 with the community. One thing I have to tell you,
24 you've been very upfront and I'm very happy about
25 that. But we really need to sit down and go over

each complex to see what your plan is going to be.

CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Coney Island Houses is right on the Boardwalk, so we have to figure out how to handle that and what needs to be done.

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I think now is the time, while we have the Army Corps of Engineers around.

CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: The other complex I just want to bring to your attention is Gravesend Houses. They're right on the bay side. Ms. Carter is the president leader. Everybody knows Ms. Carter. They're right across the street from the bay. What happened was there the bay came up first and really--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: What I really think you guys have to do is when you do a needs and assessment study, I believe that's what you're going to do on each complex--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Sure.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I really
3 think that we have to really figure out if we
4 could build some type of seawall, because I think
5 that might help in preventing that from going, you
6 know, Gravesend Houses.

7 I could go on and ask you a lot of
8 questions but I think the point is the next time
9 this happens, someone has to be in charge.
10 Someone has to be a go-to person. Someone has to
11 say to the elected officials, this is the plan;
12 this is what's going on in each complex. I really
13 believe that really we have to do a better job.

14 You know, the tenant leaders and
15 there were NYCHA people going door to door
16 throughout Coney Island. But the problem is I
17 didn't see anybody with these lists and I didn't
18 know who was in charge. I didn't know where to
19 get information or what to do. So all I could do
20 is just say that I hope the next time you do a
21 better job in reaching out, and your person who's
22 in charge should make sure they call in all the
23 electeds and tell them this is who I am, this is
24 what I'm doing, if you have a problem call me.
25 I'll be in the center, or, you know, I didn't even

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

know he existed, this guy.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: This is the first time I'm hearing about him, you know. The other thing is that I think since we have--I think I have the second largest number of NYCHA facilities--I think we have to have some type of close by, a warehouse or someplace, storage facilities, where materials could be brought in and ready to be used right after the storm, because that was another problem. People in the NYCHA facilities had no lighting, had no flashlights, didn't have--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: So we'll work with you. The biggest complaint I have? I didn't know who was in charge.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I didn't know where to get the information. I didn't know how to get information. I just hope that we could work together. When do you think these community centers are going to be up and running again? I mean, is there a plan? Do you have a calendar?

1
2 CECIL HOUSE: We are working on the
3 actual plan for the centers, but I don't have a
4 firm calendar with me.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: No, no, I
6 don't want you--

7 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] I can
8 share it. We'll be happy to meet with you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

10 CECIL HOUSE: After this meeting
11 and actually go through in detail each
12 development, each building in Coney Island and our
13 plans. I think if we work together, issues like
14 the seawall are probably a little bit challenging
15 for NYCHA alone to do.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: No--

17 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] But
18 working with our partners around the city, we can
19 definitely do as much of that as we can.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: All right,
21 so we'll set up a meeting because I'd like to go
22 over each complex and go over how we're going to
23 handle this. Thank you very much.

24 CECIL HOUSE: Sure. As we go
25 forward, we'll make sure that we get you the names

of our command center personnel for these events.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I think he should come introduce himself and just say this is what we're doing.

CECIL HOUSE: We'll do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I forgot to mention earlier that we were joined by Council Member Robert Jackson from Manhattan, who was here and left. We are still joined by Council Member Barron, to my left, who is still here. Council Member Levin? Council Member James, Tish James from Brooklyn, the far left, who also was here Council Member Levin, followed by Council Member Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you very much, Chair Mendez. I appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions. Thank you very much for coming down this afternoon. I represent Gowanus Houses. I appreciate the shout out in your testimony. I do have some real legitimate concerns about what happened at Gowanus Houses. I've been thinking about these questions for the last few months.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: One thing I just want to actually say in response to your answers to Council Member Recchia's questions, you know after the storm, Con Edison had a point person. They had somebody that was on a shift from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and someone that was on a shift from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: There was a phone number that elected officials could call. That person was there at a desk and they would answer the questions. If they weren't at the desk, we could call their cell number and they would answer. I would call Con Ed at 3:00 in the morning, and they answered my questions. There was not that type of setup with the Housing Authority. I called Brian in the middle of the night, and Brian would pick up my phone calls. But there was not that type of operation staff that was there to answer questions.

So I'm going to read to you--I wrote this out--because what happened at Gowanus Houses should not have happened. So if you'll

1
2 indulge me, I'm going to give you a timeline of
3 what happened, okay? I understand, and we all
4 understood at the time that there were other
5 developments that had more extensive damage, but I
6 want to make sure that you understand this, just
7 because other developments had more extensive
8 damage did not minimize the suffering that people
9 at Gowanus Houses were going through.

10 CECIL HOUSE: Right, I agree.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: There were
12 people that were stranded on the 10th, 11th, 12th,
13 13th floor of their buildings for 12 days, that
14 could not get down the stairs, could not see the
15 daylight. The elevators were down. There were
16 people that had mobility issues. There were
17 senior citizens. I just want to make sure that
18 the Housing Authority understands that they had an
19 obligation to take care of those people and they
20 did not meet that obligation.

21 I'm going to give you the timeline
22 here. Monday, the storm, right. Wednesday after
23 the storm, my office is informed by residents. I
24 did not receive any word from the Housing
25 Authority that there was a power outage at Gowanus

1 Houses, no communication whatsoever. Thursday, my
2 office reaches out to Con Edison. They tell my
3 office that electricity can be back on as soon as
4 possible on their end, on Con Ed's end. I get
5 that confirmed two or three times.
6

7 From what I understand, because I
8 had no communication from the Housing Authority,
9 water was not pumped from the basements. There
10 were two buildings that got flooded. The
11 electrical rooms in both of those buildings got
12 flooded with about five feet of water from the
13 Gowanus Canal. Now, this was Zone B, and that's
14 another question as to why Zone B was not flagged
15 as well.

16 From what I understand, the water
17 was not pumped from out of those basements until
18 Friday. So that's like four or five days with
19 standing water, feet of standing water in those
20 basements.

21 Friday, still no word from the New
22 York City Housing Authority. My office starts to
23 receive angry calls from residents. My response
24 is Con Ed is telling us that they're ready to go.
25 It should be any minute.

1
2 Finally, on Saturday, Assemblywoman
3 Millman was able to call in the National Guard.
4 The National Guard goes down there and sets up a
5 supply distribution and food distribution at the
6 community center. The community center is opened.
7 FUREE, a community organization, who is here
8 today, establishes a command center, a
9 distribution center.

10 Marguerite Scott and Beverly
11 Corbin, Marguerite Scott is the tenant association
12 president and Beverly Corbin, who's a board member
13 of FUREE, they set up a post at the community
14 center. They do not leave, except to sleep, until
15 the power is turned on, about six days later. So
16 they put in about 15-hour days six days straight.

17 Ms. Scott is not here today to
18 testify because she's sick. She's been sick with
19 pneumonia since the storm, I mean since days after
20 the storm. She ran herself ragged and she's been
21 suffering with pulmonary issues since.

22 On Sunday, we finally get a meeting
23 with Housing Authority staff, on Sunday night.
24 The management comes in and takes an assessment
25 and meets with community residents. That's the

1
2 last time NYCHA management is there, anyone from
3 NYCHA management is there, until late Tuesday
4 night when Marguerite Mann [phonetic] comes to
5 check up, around midnight on Tuesday night.

6 Meanwhile, there are people
7 stranded in their apartments. So from Sunday to
8 Tuesday, nobody from NYCHA management comes down.
9 I am sometimes able to get calls back. I know
10 that Brian is dealing with every development in
11 the entire city and those that are affected.

12 It's around this time that NYCHA
13 knows, and this is pretty clear at this point,
14 knows that they need to hire an electrical
15 consultant, an outside contractor to do electrical
16 work in the building. It's right in the hole that
17 goes from the street grid to the NYCHA grid.
18 NYCHA knows that it's their responsibility--this
19 is Sunday night--knows that it's their
20 responsibility, gets somebody down to replace the
21 crabs.

22 Those workers do not show up for
23 another 48 hours. When they show up finally, so
24 they show up on Wednesday morning actually, so
25 it's actually longer than 48 hours. Between that

1 time, NYCHA's electricians are down in the
2 basement. I heard them say that they had never
3 seen cables that waterlogged before in their
4 lives. It's not because it was a flood.
5 Basements get flooded. Electrical systems get
6 flooded. It's because the water sat there and the
7 cables soaked up the saltwater for four or five
8 days.
9

10 So that's what I heard just from
11 the electricians. Electricians that get called to
12 another job, it takes them basically about 48
13 hours to do what they need to do in the basement
14 so that the consultant can come in. Because it's
15 two separate buildings, they could have finished
16 one building, had the consultant come in to do
17 that building, finish the other building and have
18 the consultant come in to finish that building.

19 As it were, the consultant finally
20 comes, but they only send in one team, so two
21 electricians. So they do one and then the next
22 day they have to come and do the other.

23 When Con Ed finally comes to turn
24 the power back on, it was the night--the first
25 night was the Wednesday night into Thursday

1 morning. So this is a good 10, 11 days after the
2 storm. There is nobody from high level NYCHA
3 management to meet Con Ed when they come out at 2
4 in the morning. I was there. I was there with
5 one NYCHA employee, Mr. Roberts was there, that
6 very first night. So Con Ed comes out in the
7 middle of the nor'easter and they actually come in
8 and turn the power back on. But I had to be there
9 to make sure that they knew where to go. So
10 that's two buildings that come on that night.
11

12 The next night, nobody--Mr. Roberts
13 was somewhere else--I was the only one there to
14 meet Con Ed when they came out at 2:00 in the
15 morning to turn on the power.

16 As you can see, to the Housing
17 Authority, 72 hours where somebody is stranded in
18 their apartment, it doesn't really make that much
19 of a difference. I'm sorry, but that's the time
20 that was lost. It was about 72 hours, 72 or 96
21 hours, I think all told, it is, it is.

22 Particularly with this issue of hiring a
23 contractor, not getting around to it, electricians
24 for two hours and then they leave. The amount of
25 time that was lost and for everyone that was

1
2 feeling it, it felt like an eternity. I mean, you
3 look back, it was only 12 days. It felt like an
4 eternity.

5 The community that came together
6 was--they're the ones that--so what I want to know
7 is why didn't the Housing Authority have somebody,
8 as Council Member Recchia said, who was a point
9 person. Why didn't they have it? Number two, why
10 was it that nobody from the Housing Authority was
11 there to go and checkup on residents? That entire
12 job was done by residents, local community members
13 and FUREE. So where was NYCHA?

14 CECIL HOUSE: With all due respect,
15 Councilman, 72 hours for our residents out of
16 electricity and heat and those services actually
17 was very significant to us. I was there working
18 myself around the clock and was fully engaged in
19 trying to make sure that we were covering all of
20 our situations. We had 80,000 residents without
21 power. We had thousands of apartments available.
22 We had limited staff and we were trying to manage
23 and maneuver them as much as we could.

24 In this particular situation, we
25 hired a contractor to come in because there was

1
2 special requirements needed to actually address
3 the situation. This was in a vault, as you noted,
4 and it was a confined space area. So the
5 contractor who sent teams there initially, they
6 were not qualified to go in and work in that
7 space. So they ultimately sent in separate
8 employees who actually had confined space training
9 and they were able to actually do the work.

10 I'll have to go back and check on
11 how we had staffed for that particular night to
12 determine where our other employees were, but I'm
13 fairly certain that they were at a development
14 working on restoring the heat or the electricity
15 or the elevators or the water for NYCHA residents.
16 I'm certain of that. I just don't know exactly
17 where they were at that particular time.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: One question
19 just to take one step back. This is kind of going
20 to a broader issue and not specifically Gowanus,
21 but at what point with--like if you look at what
22 happened in Red Hook--did the Housing Authority
23 start the conversation with HUD about getting
24 boilers, for example. When did we start asking
25 HUD for the resources? When did that conversation

1
2 take place? Did that conversation take place on
3 Monday, Sunday before the storm or Tuesday or
4 Wednesday or Thursday after the storm?

5 CECIL HOUSE: So, OEM had done some
6 of that work, working with us before the storm.
7 But the specific requests for specific equipment
8 began immediately after the storm. So as we
9 dispatched our damage assessment teams, and the
10 feedback came back that our boilers were
11 underwater and that our meter rooms and electrical
12 rooms were damaged, we began the process of
13 requesting equipment through OEM immediately. We
14 began also trying to source equipment individually
15 as well.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: One thing
17 I'd like actually for you to answer as well, so
18 throughout this period of time it was reported to
19 us and it was reported on NYCHA's website and
20 NYCHA's press releases that Gowanus Houses did
21 actually have their power back up. I have press
22 releases and stuff that was communicated on the
23 6th of November, 7th of November that said that
24 Gowanus had all their electricity back up and
25 running.

1
2 What are you doing now to--because
3 clearly that was wrong, right, and it wouldn't
4 have been corrected had my office not called over
5 and said this is just wrong.

6 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: What are you
8 doing now? What steps have you taken to ensure
9 the information on your database, which is the
10 basis for your official NYCHA updates is correct?
11 What are you doing in terms of quality control?

12 CECIL HOUSE: Right. So the issue
13 with Gowanus Houses was that there were some
14 stairwells and some sections of Gowanus Houses
15 that actually had electricity--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:
17 [interposing] There was a generator doing the
18 stairwells.

19 CECIL HOUSE: Right. And our
20 miscommunication internally between our operations
21 folks and our communications team, I think we
22 actually addressed that during the storm and
23 corrected that information. So that had been
24 addressed.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Lastly, the

1 residents of Gowanus Houses are not eligible right
2 now for D-SNAP, are you aware of that? Because
3 they're not a covered zip code, they are not
4 getting covered under it. So right now, the
5 residents that lost their power and all their food
6 and their refrigerators for two weeks are not
7 eligible for Disaster SNAP that is made available
8 to a lot of other residents in New York City that
9 were affected by Sandy. Is NYCHA going to allow
10 that to happen or what are you going to do about
11 it?
12

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: You can add
14 Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis to that list as well.

15 CECIL HOUSE: I'm not aware of that
16 situation, and I'll have to look into it.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I would
18 expect that the Housing Authority would, to be
19 honest with you, would stand up to other city
20 agencies, notably HRA, to say that our residents
21 who were affected by Sandy are entitled to this
22 federal benefit. It's a federal benefit. The
23 city is not paying for it. NYCHA residents that
24 were affected by the storm deserve that benefit.
25 Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Madame

Chair.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

Council Member Lander, Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Arroyo are the next to ask.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you, Madame Chairman and Mr. Chairman, to you as well. I want to follow up on a few of the lines of questions that my colleagues have raised. Most of my experience here comes from time spent in Red Hook, assisting Council Member Gonzales and being down there a lot with a lot of folks from Park Slope in my neighborhood and working with a lot of the nonprofit groups that have been partners of mine for a while. I do want to appreciate your recognition of the value of those nonprofit and civic organizations which was missing from the deputy mayor's testimony yesterday. So I appreciate at least that you recognized that in many cases they were there faster and that they were essential partners.

The first thing I want to establish, and I think we heard this yesterday, but I think in NYCHA it was even more important.

1
2 It does seem to me one core--and I'm happy to call
3 it a thing we learned, rather than a deficiency or
4 a failure--but the city prepared a plan for
5 evacuation and shelter and found itself in a
6 shelter in place crisis that it had not prepared
7 for.

8 So I just first feel like that, to
9 me in some ways that's the big picture of what was
10 missed in the response and it was certainly the
11 big picture of what wasn't ready in NYCHA is that
12 the effort was made to get people to evacuate and
13 have them in shelters. For a range of reasons
14 we've discussed, they didn't leave and the city
15 had not prepared for people to shelter in place.
16 As a result, food and clothing distribution, water
17 distribution wasn't ready, canvas wasn't ready,
18 medical supplies weren't ready, light towers
19 weren't ready. They hadn't been pre-deployed
20 because we hadn't planned for a shelter in place
21 emergency follow-up.

22 I mean, broadly, is that a fair
23 characterization and is that informing your
24 thinking about how to be ready in future
25 disasters?

1
2 CECIL HOUSE: I think the impact,
3 potentially the impact of Hurricane Irene clearly
4 impacted our residents. I don't know why our
5 residents did not choose to evacuate to the same
6 extents that they did in Hurricane Irene.
7 Clearly, we found ourselves with more residents in
8 place than our evacuation plans had expected, and
9 we will have to adjust our plans accordingly as we
10 go forward.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. You
12 know, I spent a lot of time talking to people who
13 didn't evacuate after, and this was both in a
14 number of neighborhoods that I visited, well after
15 it was clear they were still likely to be without
16 heat or power or water. So, even after it was
17 clear how bad things were and how bad they were
18 likely to be when they get a clear answer, they
19 still didn't want to leave. So there's something
20 in people, you know, that they don't want to leave
21 their homes.

22 The Speaker actually yesterday
23 suggested some focus group work on this and I
24 think it's a good idea. We need to learn from it.
25 I think there's something about the fact that

1
2 Irene affected people and made them less likely to
3 leave, but I also think we overestimated the
4 number of people that are going to leave. Let's
5 learn from the mistake that we collectively made
6 and be ready next time. I appreciate that. I
7 think that is important.

8 Now, I do want to follow up on this
9 question of sort of chain of command, sort of on
10 the ground and kind of who were the point people.
11 In a little more sort of specific, and I wonder,
12 rather than just sort of getting into some of the
13 issues that Council Member Recchia raised with
14 sort of like who was the point person in Red Hook,
15 I wonder if you could help me understand the chain
16 of command.

17 In Red Hook, there were contractors
18 on the ground doing the work, the electrical and
19 the heating work. They were contracted, you know,
20 centrally, but there needed to be a feedback loop.
21 I mean I'll give the example that you and I
22 actually talked about before. The mobile boilers
23 arrived. In this case, the electrical contractor
24 in Red Hook had a lot of teams out there. The
25 plumbing contractor didn't have enough teams out.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So the five mobile boilers arrived but two of them were essentially being set up and the other three were waiting for the crews that were on the first two and that was the situation. Luckily, you know, you and Brian and I was able to say, hey, where are the plumbing contractors. Help me understand what the chain of command structure was so that NYCHA staff on the ground, NYCHA central staff and the contractors were in a feedback loop to make sure that information flowed as quickly as it possibly could.

CECIL HOUSE: So we had project managers from our Capital Projects Division on the ground at Red Hook actually supervising those contractors. So I know in the situation in which you're referring to, our project manager was actually off working another area. Some of those boilers had just arrived and he hadn't had a chance to actually circle around to engage with the contractors on that site. Also, we had recognized that the contractor that we had there did not have enough teams working and I think

1
2 quickly we moved to adjust that and we actually
3 had more teams arrive fairly shortly thereafter.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: That's
5 true, and I want to acknowledge that that
6 happened. I will say, because of what I said
7 first about the failure to be prepared, this was
8 all days later than I think it could have been had
9 the plan reflected deployments to shelter in place
10 but that's already, I think, been clarified.

11 The contractors on the ground were
12 responsible to project managers who were also on
13 the ground in the neighborhood? Because I guess I
14 had some sense, and it's a big agency, and those
15 contracts were written centrally. Just so I'm
16 clear whether they were sort of accountable to a
17 local project manager--

18 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] That's
19 correct.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --not to
21 somebody more centrally.

22 CECIL HOUSE: Right. At each
23 location, the contractors were being supervised by
24 project managers on the ground.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, good.

1
2 Thank you. As I mentioned earlier, you know, I
3 appreciate your recognition, especially in Red
4 Hook, in your testimony, of some of the work that
5 the local groups, the Red Hook Initiative and
6 Occupy Sandy and Red Hook Justice Center and
7 Visitation Church did. That was very sort of
8 fluid. People showed up and did it. In the case
9 of Red Hook, you know, when the NYCHA staff canvas
10 arrived some days later, there was a dialogue with
11 those groups and I think some sharing of
12 information. I give credit to people for being
13 willing to be flexible and not say, okay, you
14 know, the city is doing its thing.

15 I wondered to what extent you're
16 learning from that and trying to think about how
17 you would establish networks or connections or
18 more formal relationships between the NYCHA effort
19 and the religious, civic, nonprofit institutions
20 that turned out to be just absolutely essential
21 partners in this effort.

22 CECIL HOUSE: Could you rephrase
23 that for me?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: At least in
25 my experience, what happened here was for the

1 first few days really we weren't ready. We
2 weren't distributing food or water, there wasn't a
3 canvas, there weren't medical supplies. The city
4 wasn't. But let me say I think the city wasn't
5 providing, I don't think NYCHA wasn't providing
6 that. To me, the idea that NYCHA should have been
7 responsible rather than the City of New York
8 should have been responsible; I'll ask one more
9 question about that in a minute.
10

11 So these groups poured in and just
12 got to work. Now in Red Hook at least, and it
13 sounds to me like it was different in other
14 places, when the city did show up there was some,
15 you know, friction and tension, but actually in
16 many ways people found ways to work together. But
17 it sounds to me like in other places that happened
18 a lot less, and even in Red Hook where it
19 happened, it was sort of good fortune and flexible
20 staff and relationship building. There wasn't a
21 structure in place of partnership that had been
22 prepared in advance.

23 So for next time, I guess I'm
24 asking, what are we doing to build that in, in
25 advance, so that there is a structured

1 partnership? So you know who's on the ground in
2 which neighborhood, so they know how they can
3 contribute, so the resources that these civic and
4 nonprofit organizations and volunteers are flowing
5 in can be meshed so that it's one big canvas.
6 It's the medical resources are getting where
7 they're needed and not segmented by kind of who
8 happened to show up that day from which group. So
9 how are we going to do that in the future?

11 CECIL HOUSE: Right. Well the
12 city's efforts to distribute food started on
13 November 1st. Clearly, those efforts were
14 supplemented by various nonprofit and non-
15 governmental agencies. Red Hook is a very good
16 case of that. In a lot of those cases, and I
17 think that this point is overlooked in many cases,
18 those efforts were coordinated with and through
19 NYCHA, using NYCHA facilities or NYCHA resources
20 in one way or another. Clearly, we appreciate
21 those efforts and I think that is a model that
22 actually worked fairly well. As we look forward,
23 I think it is a way that we can allow those
24 organizations to support the residents in public
25 housing.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I guess I'd
3 like to push you to think about that a little more
4 as part of your after action review because--

5 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] We
6 will.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --people
8 worked together, but it was haphazard, made up on
9 the ground, facilitated by elected officials and
10 volunteers and good will got us a fair way, but we
11 were not--it wasn't set up in advance to be well
12 organized and coordinated. For next time, it
13 could be if we figure out what that looks like and
14 how to do it.

15 My last question, because my chair
16 is signaling me to move along, is a forward-
17 looking one. This was expensive. You know, we've
18 heard it costs families a lot of money but I know
19 it's cost NYCHA a lot of money. Obviously, some
20 of that is in the federal application but NYCHA
21 was already in a position where, you know, the
22 capital needs of the agency far outweigh the
23 resources.

24 So can you talk a little bit about
25 given what's coming from Washington, given what

1
2 you already knew in Plan NYCHA, given the
3 magnitude of the canvas that you've done on the
4 ground of what the needs are, how the costs
5 incurred during the hurricane are going to affect
6 both the operating and the capital budget, other
7 planned improvements under Plan NYCHA and critical
8 infrastructure investments. You know, we all want
9 there to be more resources for this than there
10 are, but I also want to make sure that we're clear
11 with residents in NYCHA in both these buildings
12 but also all the other buildings what the impacts
13 are, the management capacity as well as dollars.

14 CECIL HOUSE: Well, throughout the
15 response and the recovery from the storm, I mean
16 we were in constant contract with HUD. I mean
17 conference calls with HUD multiple times a day
18 throughout that process. I think that
19 communication line actually has continued with
20 information flowing back and forth.

21 So our colleagues and regulators at
22 HUD are fully aware of the impact of the storm on
23 NYCHA developments, on our capital infrastructure.
24 As the relief bill rolls out, I think that they
25 are in a good position to know what our needs are.

Clearly, just to respond on the work with the CBOs, you know we are today continuing that communication. So we will continue to do that work. As we assess our needs going forward, we want to make sure that we do that as transparently as possible, as broadly as possible and engage as many stakeholders in that process as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you, Council Member Lander. I'm going to read the list of Council Members. Melissa Mark-Viverito, Arroyo, Brewer, Barron, James then myself and then we go to the public, and we have a lot of people from the public. If you can be succinct with questions and answers, but please, if they're essential questions, I don't want you not to ask them.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: I just have one quick question, Madame Chair. I really want to commend all of my colleagues that represent districts that were severely impacted because a lot of them did exemplary work.

I went out to Domenic Recchia's

1 district with Council Member James to Coney Island
2 Houses, and it was quite a few days later, and
3 still to see the level of damage and that the
4 boilers were not online yet, electricity was not
5 on line, it's incredible to see.
6

7 So the question I have is that in
8 your statement or in your testimony, you indicated
9 that it was known that a lot of people were not
10 evacuating. So it was known that people were
11 staying in place. I'm assuming that in terms of
12 the communication with the city it was known that
13 there was going to be flooding. Correct? Was
14 there an assumption made on NYCHA's behalf that if
15 flooding were to occur that equipment was going to
16 be damaged and possibly offline? Was that
17 something that you were modeling?

18 I'm trying to find out what
19 modeling scenarios you were looking at, knowing
20 already that people were staying in place, knowing
21 that there was going to be flooding, knowing that
22 most possibly equipment was going to be offline.
23 To what extent did that inform what actions you
24 were going to take after the storm? Because I
25 would think, you know, one of the things that I

1
2 found, you know, speaking to what Domenic was
3 saying, I really saw very little if any NYCHA
4 staff when we were there.

5 We literally were climbing 14
6 stories and knocking on people's doors to give
7 them water. So to the extent that there was any
8 sort of--you know, now were you assessing the
9 needs of the people that were staying in place
10 once the storm happened and once the equipment was
11 offline? I'm just trying to piece it together
12 whether there was any sort of thinking and having
13 that knowledge ahead of time inform what steps you
14 were going to take afterwards. If you didn't,
15 that's something that probably you could learn
16 from this process. There was a lot of
17 understanding of what was going to happen once the
18 storm hit. So if you could just maybe speak to
19 that a little bit.

20 CECIL HOUSE: Sure. Well, clearly,
21 there are things that we can learn from Sandy and
22 we will do that, no question about that. But if
23 we go back to the time before the storm, and as
24 Deputy Mayor Halloway testified yesterday, the
25 expected surge was in the 9 to 11 foot range and

1 where we ended up was almost four feet above that.
2 So that does present a different set of
3 circumstances based upon what your expectations
4 are going in. But our preparation efforts were
5 for--
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:

8 [interposing] Let me just say that--let me just
9 ask. Knowing and operating from what you were
10 saying, okay, great, the surge was much more than
11 what was originally anticipated. Operating from
12 the understanding of what the surge was going to
13 be, was there an assessment made as to what level
14 of damage that would inflict? If it was going to
15 have equipment go offline in certain areas, maybe
16 focusing in those areas, making sure you contacted
17 the residents. You know, I'm just trying to
18 understand how you used that information to plan.

19 CECIL HOUSE: Well, that's actually
20 what I was going to say.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:

22 Okay, go ahead, sorry.

23 CECIL HOUSE: Knowing that,
24 notwithstanding those forecasts, we anticipated
25 sort of an all hazard perspective. So if you

1
2 noted in my testimony, we went to the boiler rooms
3 in the Zone A areas and turned off and
4 disconnected the boilers. We lifted the
5 elevators, et cetera. So we took steps to get as
6 much of our equipment out of harm's way in all
7 those developments and all those areas as
8 possible.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:

10 Right, and that's where I want to stop you and
11 then I'm going to end my questioning. You did
12 focus on assessing the damage, the structural
13 damage to the buildings.

14 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: I'm
16 asking about the people, the residents that lived
17 in the apartments. Like to what extent were you
18 saying let's have an action plan where we are
19 going to go door to door, already knowing that a
20 lot of people stayed in place. You already had
21 that information, so you knew people were
22 homebound. How about going and doing an
23 assessment of what the need was? Where are the
24 elderly, the people that need medical needs? To
25 what level of survey and coordination was done?

1
2 Fine, the assessment of the equipment, but you
3 didn't speak anything, to be honest, and that kind
4 of alarms me, you didn't speak anything about what
5 level of assessment was being done by NYCHA of the
6 residents that were in these evacuation zones and
7 that were in buildings that were offline.

8 CECIL HOUSE: Well, I think in my
9 testimony, I did talk about our efforts prior to
10 the storm. So clearly, we focused on the mobility
11 impaired and those that were on life sustaining
12 equipment first, primarily, but we communicated
13 broadly, prior to the storm. After the storm, I
14 testified that we went out, we actually did
15 outreach to the people who were mobility impaired
16 and were on life sustaining equipment again, and
17 we initiated efforts to do more broad outreach.

18 We coordinated those efforts with
19 the city, with other agencies to make sure that we
20 were able to reach as much of the population a
21 possible. But, you know, NYCHA's public housing
22 residents are a part of the city, and we were part
23 of a broader effort with the city to reach out to
24 the impacted populations.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: I

1
2 could ask so many more questions on this but I
3 will leave that. I don't think it's satisfactory
4 what I've heard, but I appreciate your responses.
5 I'll leave it there, Madame Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
7 Arroyo?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you,
9 Madame Chair. Good afternoon. I'm going to go
10 right to questions. There are three general areas
11 that I want to focus on, and they involve ongoing
12 conversations that this committee and this Council
13 has had with the Authority on issues that impact
14 how you do business, or how you're handling
15 certain issues.

16 Repairs. We have had to, on some
17 occasions, stand up and speak to defend NYCHA in
18 its efforts to move forward the issues of just
19 general ongoing repairs in the developments. What
20 is the status of the jobs that residents were
21 waiting to be done and completed or addressed
22 prior to the storm event? Have they been impacted
23 in terms of the timeframe that they can expect
24 those jobs to be done?

25 CECIL HOUSE: So, a good portion of

1 the work during the storm and the response is
2 being handled by third party contractors. We are
3 clearly utilizing NYCHA resources as well, but as
4 we've testified, we did, in our response, bring in
5 quite a few third party contractors as a part of
6 that process. We've been hiring--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

9 [interposing] I'm sorry. To deal with the storm
10 related damage?

11 CECIL HOUSE: Right, to deal with
12 the storm related issues.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: No, I want
14 to talk about the repairs.

15 CECIL HOUSE: Sure, I--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
17 [interposing] The day-to-day stuff.

18 CECIL HOUSE: Sure, I'm with you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

20 CECIL HOUSE: We have also brought
21 on, through this Department of Labor grant, some
22 additional resources. So, my point is those
23 resources have allowed us to continue to focus on
24 day-to-day efforts. We will be rolling out our
25 plan to address the ongoing backlog in our

1 maintenance and repairs program shortly. We do
2 expect to make progress on that and there will not
3 be a significant delay in that as a result of the
4 hurricane.

5
6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Are
7 residents being notified that the work in their
8 apartment will be delayed by x amount of time due
9 to the need for NYCHA to rearrange its efforts?

10 CECIL HOUSE: No. No, actually--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
12 [interposing] They should not expect delays?

13 CECIL HOUSE: No.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. Say
15 that again.

16 CECIL HOUSE: No.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

18 CECIL HOUSE: I expect it to
19 ultimately be sooner.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Look, I
21 respect the work that you do and I'm one of those
22 that stand by you, saying let's give him an
23 opportunity to improve what they do. You
24 testified that in order to clean up apartments,
25 you're moving families temporarily and in some

1 cases permanently. We've talked about downsizing
2 families. How does that impact your work on
3 getting families into a right size--I think that's
4 the term we use--unit.
5

6 CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Because we
8 have a list of families that have to transition
9 into smaller units. How is this work that you're
10 doing now going to impact your ability to move
11 that work forward?

12 CECIL HOUSE: So the families that
13 were transferred as a result of the storm were
14 transferred voluntarily at their option, but they
15 would be transferred to a right size unit. We
16 did, during the early days of the storm delay some
17 transfers while we were determining whether we
18 needed empty apartments. But our process has
19 continued, and we will continue our right sizing
20 efforts as we go forward.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Jobs, job
22 training. As unfortunate as this storm was and
23 how it impacted people's lives was significant,
24 but it certainly provides us an incredible
25 opportunity to connect residents with employment.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CECIL HOUSE: Six months.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: It sounds
conflicting.

CECIL HOUSE: For six months.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So 400
residents, no more than that? Why only 400?

CECIL HOUSE: That's all on that
grant. In addition, we've seen 200 of our
residents employed in contracts in other areas.
We'll continue to work on that. I can get you a
more detailed assessment of which contractors they
are--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

[interposing] And vendors?

CECIL HOUSE: --and where they--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

[interposing] Vendors, city vendors, how many city
vendors are we providing opportunity to get
contracts with NYCHA for the work that has to be
done?

CECIL HOUSE: Well, quite a few
city companies have been working for us, but I
don't have that list here with me. I'll be happy
to share that with you after the hearing.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I know that
3 we have had contact with some companies who some
4 of us are familiar with who are telling us that
5 they have the capacity to work, to do the work but
6 that NYCHA is bringing in out of city, out of
7 state vendors. I think that that's just
8 unacceptable, given that these vendors are more
9 likely to employ our community residents. I think
10 that that's something that as an agency authority
11 you really need to drill down and do better in.

12 CECIL HOUSE: I agree.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Because
14 they understand and know that our city residents
15 are good, quality employees and will probably be a
16 more long-term relationship for them than these
17 vendors that are coming in from out of state that
18 do not have a commitment to us as a city in any
19 way expect to walk away with a check after they've
20 done a job that we may not be happy with.

21 CECIL HOUSE: So in the early days
22 of the storm, there was a focus on making sure
23 that we got the work done, but we've returned to
24 our normal procurement practices, and we've always
25 had a focus on--

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING 124

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

[interposing] And I--

CECIL HOUSE: We'll address that as we go forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Our security camera schedule installations. We had a hearing here, I think it was late last spring, if I'm not mistaken, where the chairman brought out some boards that had green bars and blue bars and that stuff.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So this Sandy cleanup aftermath stuff should not be a reason why that plan does not move forward the way we have promised our community and residents in our developments that you guys are going to do.

CECIL HOUSE: Those are my expectations as well. I will say in some of the areas that were impacted by the storm, we may not be able to do it in the same timeframe or the same way, but everywhere else shouldn't be a problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. So please tell us where those locations are--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Okay.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --so that
3 we have all invested a lot of time and energy
4 working with you to get information out to our
5 residents about your plan regarding security
6 systems.

7 CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: That where
9 there is a delay in any one of those commitments
10 that we have made with you to our developments and
11 the residents that we update them accordingly. I
12 think we can all understand that there may be a
13 delay. We just need to have accurate real
14 information on the ground so people can understand
15 that there is a delay and understand why.

16 CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
18 very much. I'm Gale Brewer, and I have the upper
19 west side. So I didn't have the same challenges
20 that my colleagues do. We did send out as much
21 support as we could. My question is, is there any
22 silver lining to any of this? In other words, to
23 be honest with you, all of our developments, at
24 least most of them have mold. Did you learn
25 something that you can then system-wide do

1 something to correct? The same thing with the
2 transparency of contracts that other Council
3 Members have talked about, the capital budget is
4 unbelievably slow at NYCHA. I'll just leave it at
5 that. It is so slow. So my question is how are
6 you going to be more transparent about these
7 contracts? Are they going to be up on the web
8 that this company has this contract for this
9 development? You're talking about a lot of money
10 now, and I suppose you're one of the biggest
11 agencies that's going to be employing post-Sandy.

12 The second issue, of course, is the
13 issue of--is a health issue, how are you going to
14 help correct that everywhere in the future, if
15 we're talking about mold? Contracts transparency
16 and how slow contracts are normally. The
17 technical assistance needed for tenant
18 associations is huge. You said in your report
19 you're going to talk about that. I don't mean to
20 be difficult. We have been talking about this for
21 50 years, okay. So this could be an opportunity
22 for you to actually do something to support these
23 amazing TA leaders. And the TA leaders no good,
24 what can the residents do to find a new one?
25

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

Finally, I want to know the status of holdovers. It came up earlier with the Speaker, how many and so on. Did people get evicted or were they able to stay? How are you dealing with those who I think have a justifiable reason not to pay all of their rent? So it's health, transparency, TA support, and what's going

on with the holdovers.

CECIL HOUSE: So on the mold issue, you asked for a silver lining. We did undertake a fairly rigorous program, and the affected areas around mold. We knocked on over 20,000 doors as part of that process and gained access to apartments that we may not have otherwise gained access to and was able to get in and actually remediate mold issues, whether it was small mold or significant amounts of mold. So those are things that as we go forward we won't have to work on, and those are conditions that we've addressed. We've continued that process across the city to make sure that we continue to reduce any mold, whether it's a function of housekeeping issues or whatever.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I understand.

CECIL HOUSE: So we're continuing to do that. So I think that is a positive coming out of that as go forward.

As far as holdovers, our moratorium has been in place.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, I

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

know.

CECIL HOUSE: We extended it
through February.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

CECIL HOUSE: So we have not had
evictions in the affected area as a result of
that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I
don't want to see any is what I'm trying to say.

CECIL HOUSE: Okay. The issues
with the TAs and the lists, clearly that is part
of our after action review and potential lessons
learned that we'll put into our action plan as we
go forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We have,
we're 100 percent TA good on the west side.

CECIL HOUSE: Excellent.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But that's
not true across the city.

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They need
help. I'm just saying, I don't mean to disrespect
you, but 50 years, the same discussion. So I'm
hoping that that might change.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Go ahead.

CECIL HOUSE: I'll work on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Then the transparency of the contracts, the unbelievably-- you have a wonderful staff in capital now. I don't know; it's still slow.

CECIL HOUSE: So our contracting process, last year we undertook a fairly significant effort to reduce the amount of time it takes us to contract and we actually did do that. As we are--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
[interposing] A little bit.

CECIL HOUSE: We made significant improvements but we do still have to follow the regulations that we must follow for procurement. So we've made significant progress. All of our contracts that are significant are put on our website. They're bid for public notice. So you do get visibility--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
[interposing] I'm just saying you might want to-- like do the tenant associations know where the

1
2 contracts are? Are they aware of these different
3 job opportunities? Not everybody has internet.

4 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm trying
6 to give you--I won't go on and on--but a different
7 way to approach how you work with some of your
8 residents. Silver lining, if there is such a
9 thing, but all of the storm related contracts
10 should be up and readable, understandable, non PDF
11 legalese.

12 CECIL HOUSE: Okay. We'll
13 definitely work on that. You know, we have been
14 working through our zone program to reach our
15 residents. I think we're doing a much better job
16 at reaching out to them and making sure that they
17 are aware, whether it's electronic communication
18 or onsite communication with them about job
19 opportunities. So we are making good progress
20 there.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

22 Thank you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you,
24 Madame Chair. You know, what always fascinates me
25 is hearings. What you hear at hearings and what

1
2 you see walking through the streets is totally
3 different. You know, when I listen to the Mayor's
4 Office and NYCHA, you wouldn't believe what
5 actually happened in the streets when we hear the
6 hearings, because we prepare for hearings and
7 nobody wants to be at fault or blame. So we come
8 prepared for that. You know, what happened in New
9 Orleans, the people of New Orleans, they survived
10 Katrina. What they didn't survive is FEMA and
11 Bush, the neglect. So sometimes we get past the
12 disaster, its what happens afterwards that really
13 hurts us tremendously.

14 The preparation for this, no one in
15 their right mind would ever say that the city,
16 NYCHA or any other agency adequately prepared for
17 what happened. They just didn't. If you know a
18 surge is coming from 9 to 12 feet, and in like
19 Canarsie, in the Canarsie area where the Fresh
20 Creek is, was a B category zone, the surge came
21 five feet high, filled up the basements and people
22 were not told to evacuate. They had to stay
23 there. Then if they tried to run out in the
24 streets, some were running out in their streets
25 with their children held over their heads because

1 the water, you know, was up to their chests,
2 scared to death. We have Bayview in my area and
3 Brookline in my area, but most of the East New
4 York area was not hit.

5
6 The problem I have is that if you
7 couldn't predict when they said a full moon was
8 here, a high tide and this is one of the widest
9 storms ever, if we couldn't get prepared--I'm
10 scared to death if, God forbid, this thing happens
11 anytime soon, we're in big trouble. So it's not
12 important to just make sure we're not at fault and
13 not to make sure we did the right thing.

14 I'm not going to ask a question,
15 because they were asked, and I'll be finished in
16 one minute. There are so many people that want to
17 speak. But when you say you spoke to all the
18 NYCHA resident leaders, I saw so many heads
19 shaking like that in the audience.

20 [Laughter]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I can only
22 go by that nonverbal response, whatever that
23 means. The rent credit, that was low. That was
24 low for the chairman to say that here's a
25 Thanksgiving present. You have rent credit in

1
2 January. Thanksgiving is in November. The best
3 thing you could have done is said don't pay no
4 rent for November and December. Take care of
5 yourself, because some people were seriously,
6 seriously injured.

7 So I just think sometimes people
8 just want to know you care by your action. You
9 don't have to resolve all the problems because
10 this is a phenomenal--this is a heavy, heavy thing
11 to do. Even as elected officials, some people, as
12 long as you show up and you show you care, they
13 work with you. But when neglect happens, that's
14 when people feel, particularly in black and Latino
15 areas. Particular, nobody likes to deal with
16 race, but when you're talking about black and
17 Latino, most of the NYCHA residents and even the
18 citywide preparedness, they were leaving some of
19 our areas and going to other areas and FEMA was
20 prioritizing and we had to fight FEMA.

21 So I'll leave it at that, because
22 you've been asked a lot of questions, and respect
23 to my chair and respect to the people. We've just
24 got to be prepared because I am scared to death we
25 are not ready. We are not ready, and the people

are still suffering. I'll leave it at that.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member James?

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you.

My name is Leticia James and I represent Fort Greene, Ingersoll, Whiteman and Farragut.

Although Sandy did not affect the residents in my district, nonetheless, I decided to go to Red Hook and Staten Island and Rockaway and Lower East Side to help out. So my question to you, there's a number of questions, but did any residents die during Sandy or as a result of Sandy? If so, how many?

CECIL HOUSE: The medical examiner has identified one NYCHA resident death as a result of the storm.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Was it a result of being left alone in the home? Not being evacuated? No one was able to reach that individual? Do you have any facts?

CECIL HOUSE: I don't know the circumstances, the exact circumstances around it. I think I would refer you to the Medical Examiner's Office. They may have more

information.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Where did that death occur?

CECIL HOUSE: In the Rockaways.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: With regards to the mold, you indicated that someone has knocked on the doors of nearly 24,000 individual apartments to check for Sandy-related mold. Who did the knocking? Were the individuals experienced in mold remediation? Who exactly did the knocking?

CECIL HOUSE: We hired third party contractors to do that work.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: You said you did not locate significant Sandy related mold, however where we encountered any mold conditions, we removed it.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: What exactly did you do?

CECIL HOUSE: So there were about 400 or so apartments on the first floor where we identified were in the flood, below the flood line. We went in and inspected all of those

1
2 apartments to determine whether they had any mold
3 in them at all. We took care of that mold. We
4 cleaned it. We remediated it.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So 400
6 apartments were affected by mold and they--

7 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] No, no,
8 no, no.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I'm sorry.

10 CECIL HOUSE: There were 400
11 apartments that were below the flood line in all
12 of the NYCHA developments. That was the group
13 that we would have expected to have mold, given
14 that they had water, and those were the ones that
15 we targeted for that sort of special focus, and we
16 went into those apartments.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Of the 400,
18 how many were affected by mold?

19 CECIL HOUSE: It was a fairly low
20 number. Less than--I'll have to get you the exact
21 number, but I don't think it was 25.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: If you
23 could, at some point in time, if you don't have it
24 with you today, if you could provide me with the
25 process upon which the mold was remediated, I'd

1 appreciate it.

2 CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: The boilers,
4 why did it take so long to get boilers? I
5 understand they came from out of state. Could we
6 not have found a contractor in the city and/or the
7 State of New York?
8

9 CECIL HOUSE: We looked for
10 contractors in the city and state of New York for
11 boilers and we did not find one, in the very early
12 days.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So the only
14 boilers that are available are those that were
15 mentioned in your testimony, from Texas and
16 Tennessee, et cetera.

17 CECIL HOUSE: That is correct. We
18 were searching for boilers and other agencies were
19 searching for boiler for us and those were the
20 first available boilers that we found.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Now as a
22 result of Sandy, do you have emergency contracts
23 in the event of any possible storm in the future
24 that are now part of your portfolio?

25 CECIL HOUSE: We're looking at

1
2 putting in place those emergency contracts in the
3 event of a storm.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: How much has
5 been set aside for that?

6 CECIL HOUSE: We have not allocated
7 specific funding for that at this point.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: My last
9 question, since the chair is looking at me, is has
10 NYCHA requested reimbursement from FEMA? If so,
11 how much?

12 CECIL HOUSE: The process for FEMA
13 actually is not--we're not at that point yet for
14 the actual request but we do intend to request
15 reimbursement from FEMA. We expect that that
16 amount could be in the range of \$200-\$300 million.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: \$200-\$300
18 million. The process upon which individuals get
19 abatement for their rent, what is the process?
20 Because some individuals have indicated to me that
21 they've attempted to get abatement and it's been
22 partial. It's now my understanding that you are
23 offering full abatement. What is the process that
24 individuals have to go through to get a full
25 abatement?

CECIL HOUSE: So it is full
abatement per day.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Per day.

CECIL HOUSE: Right. So if you
were without a service on a day then your rent is
abated for that day. So we calculated those
amounts and the reduction in rent was reflected in
the January statement.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Is the
burden of proof upon the tenant to show that they
were without electricity, lights, et cetera, et
cetera?

CECIL HOUSE: Well, we have fairly
detailed records of the buildings that were
without electricity. But if there is a tenant
that has information on their building being
without electricity as a result of the storm and
the impacted areas, if you can just give us that
information, we'll be able to address that.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: The onus is
on the individual to provide you with the
information as opposed to you just offering them
the credit automatically because you have the
information?

1
2 CECIL HOUSE: Well, no, if we have
3 the information, then we would have offered them
4 the credit. So there clearly is a discrepancy if
5 someone thinks that they were without those
6 services and did not get it at this point. So we
7 need to do the research on that to make sure that
8 we get that addressed.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you.
10 Nothing else, thank you, Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
12 I'm just going to ask a few questions because I do
13 want to get to the public testimony. So just for
14 the record, the one death that happened was an
15 older gentleman who fell down the stairs where was
16 no lights in the building, in the stairwell. I
17 don't remember what the...

18 How many deaths happened during
19 those months that are just not attributed to Sandy
20 but maybe could have been somewhat Sandy?

21 CECIL HOUSE: Well, I'm aware of
22 one additional death that occurred in our
23 developments during, I think that October or
24 November. I'm sorry, it was November, at some
25 point in November.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Is that the one in my district?

CECIL HOUSE: That's the one I'm referring to.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I want to ask about the vulnerable population. So you have a list. People self-select in. If people don't self-select in, I'm assuming you can, or how difficult is it to track all those other people who don't self-select in?

CECIL HOUSE: So we do not track individuals with special needs that do not self-identify.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you get-- so here it is, right. You have your developments.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: The managers would know who's in a wheelchair, who's not. May or may not know who has an oxygen tank. There are some of them that can be identified. So even if they don't self-select into this list, can that information be retrieved from a housing manager and provided to someone just to make sure that they're okay?

1
2 CECIL HOUSE: So I know during the
3 storm, there were situations in which housing
4 assistants or property managers were aware of
5 residents needing special needs that were not on
6 the list and they did check in on them. That did
7 occur.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. In your
9 senior buildings, how many senior buildings were
10 in the evacuation zone, in Zone A?

11 CECIL HOUSE: I don't have those
12 exact numbers for senior buildings but it was a
13 handful.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I sort of feel
15 like you should know this off the top of your
16 head, but I know there's a lot that went on, so
17 it's okay. So do you have how many numbers--do
18 you have the numbers of how many senior buildings
19 were in any of the impacted area, blackout zone--

20 CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] So two
21 buildings, two senior.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's not
23 true. It's more than that.

24 CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In my

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

district, there's--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] In Zone A?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --two senior buildings. In Margaret's district there's one senior building that I know about.

CECIL HOUSE: Right. Are the buildings in your district in Zone B though?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Listen, okay. Seniors who were not mandatorily evacuated, were in high rise buildings, were not told to evacuate, they were at more risk than anyone else. I understand they were not Zone A.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: But something needed to be done about them because they had no running water. As a matter of fact, one of my seniors, a tenant president from a Zone B building that didn't evacuate because she didn't have to, had an oxygen tank. The only reason she survived is because her next door neighbor's daughter, who is a police officer, came with a cell phone. They were able, because no one could reach 911. She was able to call her daughter at the police

1 station who got EMS to come in and take her out.

2 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

3 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: My tenant
4 president from Meltzer Houses was lucky. Another
5 resident in a Mitchell Lama building of mine was
6 not so lucky. The same situation. She died in
7 the EMS truck. So there are a lot of other deaths
8 in the city that are not being counted that I feel
9 are Sandy related. There is, I believe, a
10 responsibility to everyone regardless of what
11 zone, once we realize that there was a blackout
12 and people were not prepared.

13 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Particularly
15 those that were not prepared, to do something for
16 them. I requested from NYCHA for them to go into
17 Meltzer Houses and Baruch Addition. I was at
18 Baruch Addition and when I got to Meltzer, because
19 I was told someone was going to Meltzer, so I went
20 to another special needs building of mine, not a
21 NYCHA building. When I got to Meltzer, no one had
22 been there yet. So what, if anything, was NYCHA
23 doing in those other buildings that were not Zone
24 A that were not flooded?
25

1
2 CECIL HOUSE: So after the flood,
3 we did actually make efforts to survey the senior
4 buildings, to check on the residents in those
5 buildings.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So I
7 guess that was whenever it was. In Meltzer, I was
8 there Thursday night and Friday, NYCHA had not
9 been there. Then Friday night, we got the lights.
10 So I think this is something we need to talk
11 about, because had NYCHA told me--I was told by
12 NYCHA we're going to go in there. Had NYCHA told
13 me, I don't know when we can get in there, and
14 that's very reasonable, considering the magnitude,
15 I would have done things a little differently in
16 that building.

17 So I'm just going to ask, there are
18 a lot of questions, which I'm not going to ask
19 because I really want the public to answer them,
20 so we will talk to you about it. Actually, this
21 hearing will be held over because we will regroup
22 to talk about the plan that we finally got from
23 the administration.

24 There was an email or a letter that
25 was sent out about a gag order, not allowing NYCHA

1
2 staff to talk to elected officials. Can you tell
3 me a little bit about that?

4 CECIL HOUSE: So I'm not aware of
5 an email sent out as a gag order.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's my
7 terminology.

8 CECIL HOUSE: I am aware of an
9 email that I sent out reminding our employees of
10 our communications policy that we want to make
11 sure that communications to the media on material
12 matters for NYCHA are actually run through our
13 Department of Communications.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Even if
15 it was not just media, even elected officials?

16 CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, I think the
17 focus was on making sure that we got correct
18 information and good quality information. As the
19 Speaker mentioned earlier, there was information
20 coming that actually wasn't of the same quality of
21 the information that we were able to provide
22 through our communications organization. So our
23 focus was on making sure that the information was
24 of good quality.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's

understandable. Transfers, how many residents were offered transfers from the flooded buildings or vulnerable individuals, and how many actually did decide to transfer?

CECIL HOUSE: So we have 170 requests for transfers. So far, 57 of those have already been relocated and we have 42 in the process. We have some that have refused available units, so that will be managed as we go forward.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's not just Zone A. That's your Sandy impacted--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing]
Absolutely, yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: The number of developments that were Sandy impacted were, there was 26 in Zone A and then that--

CECIL HOUSE: [interposing] Yeah, it was a total of 423 buildings, it was the 423 buildings that we referenced.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: How many developments, do you know that number? I don't know if it was 55 or 59, and that includes the 26 from Zone A.

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, I actually have

not, in my list here tallied them that way. I've been focused on the overall number of buildings.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: All right, if I can get the number of developments at some point.

CECIL HOUSE: Sure, we can do that.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So damages, you said the amount of damages suffered by the Authority is how much?

CECIL HOUSE: So our assessment so far has our damages in the \$800 million range.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: \$800 million?

CECIL HOUSE: \$800 million. We may end up close to a billion dollars as we complete our reviews.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: How much money do you think you'll get from FEMA or insurance or anywhere that'll give you money?

CECIL HOUSE: Our insurance coverage limits are up to \$410 million. So we'll have to see how much of that coverage gets invoked, but we expect that that will be pretty close to that amount. Then any amounts above that, we will be working with the city and other

1 agencies and FEMA to work on reimbursement.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you tell
3 me after the earthquake and after Irene how much
4 reimbursement did you get from FEMA and was it the
5 amount you requested and was it the amount that
6 was the damage?
7

8 CECIL HOUSE: Well, given the focus
9 here was Sandy, I don't have those numbers
10 present, but I can get those for you.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I'm
12 just trying to get a sense of how we might fare
13 with them and how we did the last time.

14 CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Protective
16 gear. There has been some articles in the news
17 that some of the workers were not given training
18 and wearing protective gear. What if anything can
19 you tell me about that?

20 CECIL HOUSE: Well, we went back
21 and looked at the situations and we found that our
22 workers have been trained to do their work. I
23 know there was a situation in which an OSHA
24 inspector was following one of our contractors and
25 in that process, a worker took off a mask. So the

1 OSHA inspector noted that the worker put his mask
2 back on, but that was the extent of it actually.
3 Generally, our contractors, and as we require them
4 to, we require that they comply with all laws and
5 regulations. We monitor that and they are to the
6 extent that we know, doing so.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So everyone
9 who's working in the Sandy related issues, all
10 these new workers, have been trained and have
11 always had protective gear on?

12 CECIL HOUSE: Right. They are
13 issued personal protective equipment as
14 appropriate for the work that they are doing. You
15 know, the supervisors need to make sure that they
16 are utilizing it, and that's our task.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Regarding the
18 money, when you get this money, it will come
19 directly to NYCHA and you will start to use it in
20 the buildings as needed, or it will go to the city
21 or will it go to the state? I mean, how is this
22 money going to get here and who will be making
23 those decisions?

24 CECIL HOUSE: Well I think that's
25 still to be determined. So the House bill that

1 was passed had a significant portion of grants.
2 Usually grants, from the federal government, are
3 made to the state and then maybe distributed down
4 from there. We do know that there is a
5 possibility that the city will be a grant agency
6 as well and funds will go there. We are regulated
7 by and funded from HUD. So I don't know if
8 there's a possibility of funds coming directly
9 from HUD at this point. We'll have to see what
10 the final bill looks like and we'll also have to
11 see how the secretary of HUD actually determines
12 those allocations.
13

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So do you know
15 how many, if any, tenant associations or resident
16 associations have applied for TPF, tenant
17 participation funds, to do emergency preparedness?

18 CECIL HOUSE: I do not know how
19 many have prepared specifically for emergency
20 preparedness, but we can look at that and get you
21 that information.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. That's
23 one of the things I want to start focusing on.
24 The federal government through HUD gives us money
25 for our resident associations, and every

1
2 association, particularly in all those Zone A
3 buildings and some of those Zone B developments
4 need to start getting together to access that
5 money to do emergency preparedness, to have your
6 go bags and to have those lists of vulnerable
7 people ready. That is something that the tenant
8 associations have to apply for. I urge everyone
9 to work with your not-for-profits, with NYCHA,
10 with your elected officials so that we can get the
11 money into those developments that so sorely need
12 them.

13 I'm going to wrap up here, and
14 we'll be in touch about my other questions. You
15 know, Sandy got the best of us. It really, you
16 know we didn't anticipate this and it certainly
17 got the best of NYCHA. But it also brought out
18 the best in us. The humanity that was displayed,
19 strangers, not just neighbors but strangers who
20 came in to help. I think that's one thing we
21 should focus on.

22 We did a lot of work, and I worked
23 with NYCHA, particularly before the storm hit in
24 evacuation but I know people did not want to
25 leave. I walked through my developments with a

1
2 bullhorn and people looked out the window and
3 said, the elevator is still working and it's past
4 7. I said, okay, they'll be shutting it down. It
5 takes a while to shut everything down.

6 So I know you were out there but I
7 was also frustrated and particularly with the
8 administration when we kept asking for food.

9 There was no food in my district on Sunday or
10 Monday in my supermarkets. Then once the storm
11 hit, a lot of those stores were flooded and
12 couldn't open. So people were hungry and many of
13 them couldn't leave their buildings, and the ones
14 that could, couldn't find any food. It was very
15 painful to see this throughout my entire district
16 and knowing that some districts were hit even
17 worse than mine.

18 To see it now, even months later,
19 to see what you're still going through, trying to
20 recover and get everything back up to speed.
21 Before you know it, we'll be sitting around the
22 table again, because in just a few more months,
23 this could happen to us again.

24 I want to once again thank you for
25 being here today. I want to thank you for your

1
2 testimony. I want to thank you for what you did
3 right and for what you did wrong and always for
4 trying to do things better. Because I push you
5 always to try to make things better. I think we
6 did learn some stuff from Irene, so otherwise this
7 would have been worse. We will continue this
8 hearing.

9 Now we will get ready for the
10 public testimony. I noticed see that things
11 thinned out, so as I call your name, please raise
12 your hand because if not, I will throw someone
13 else into that panel.

14 [Pause]

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Someone will
16 be staying from NYCHA, as you always do, right?
17 Thank you, Mr. House. Mr. House, was this your
18 first hearing?

19 CECIL HOUSE: [off mic]

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Oh my god,
21 congratulations. Or not, I don't know, but I
22 think you did all right. Thank you.

23 Valerie Jean from FUREE. We have a
24 panel of legal services and FUREE members that are
25 going to be giving testimony together. Valerie

I'm going to call up the panel after that, which is a big panel, just so you know. So this will be the third panel. Lara Weibyen? Okay, from People's Relief Effort. Evangelean Pugh from Community Voices Heard. You're going to be on the third panel. Ann Valdez, you're going to be on that third panel. Edward Alexander, third panel. Community Voices Heard, Gloria Wilson, third panel. Gilbert

Alicea, Good Old Lower East Side, from my hood,
third panel. And Emily Rosenblatt, from GOLES,
third panel.

We have more panels coming up after
that, but at least we can get ready. Okay,
whoever is ready, just grab the microphone and
start giving your testimony. I will be here until
the last person testifies. So if you want to
testify, you have to make sure you fill out one of
these little sheets. Thank you, Maria, for being
here, from the Bronx.

SONJA SHIELD: Good afternoon. Can
you hear me? Good afternoon. Thank you for the
opportunity to give testimony this afternoon. My
name is Sonja Shield. I'm a staff attorney at
South Brooklyn Legal Services, which is part of
Legal Services NYC. We are the largest provider
of legal services, free legal services in the
country.

Since Sandy, Legal Services staff
has been in all of the affected neighborhoods.
We've spent hundreds of hours in Lower Manhattan,
the Rockaways, Staten Island, Coney Island, Red
Hook, Gowanus, Sheepshead Bay, and Gerritsen

1
2 Beach. We witnessed NYCHA's silence and lack of
3 responsiveness while we and other organizations
4 and community members rallied to help NYCHA
5 tenants. I'm speaking today with members of
6 FUREE, Families United for Racial and Economic
7 Equality.

8 NYCHA's post-Sandy response
9 demonstrated a massive failure of coordination and
10 communication and a crisis of leadership from the
11 top down. NYCHA appears to have had no plan in
12 place to deal with elderly or disabled residents
13 trapped in high-rise buildings. We look forward,
14 like the Council does, to seeing what NYCHA's
15 disaster plan actually shows.

16 As you've heard repeatedly, in
17 place of NYCHA employees, it fell to groups like
18 Legal Services to go door to door, up and down
19 stairwells, in cold and dark NYCHA developments to
20 help tenants.

21 What information NYCHA's leadership
22 did put out was incomplete and often inaccurate.
23 We continued to hear from tenants that despite
24 NYCHA's assurances that utilities had been
25 restored that utilities had not been restored or

1
2 was intermittent and continued to be lost. People
3 relied on those assurances. We heard from a
4 number of Council Members today that the Council
5 Members would have taken different action if NYCHA
6 had been more accurate in the information that
7 they gave to the Council Members.

8 We spoke to residents who heard
9 that the utilities were back on and promptly went
10 out and bought more food to put in their
11 refrigerators and then lost a whole new set of
12 food that they had just bought. The problems with
13 the utilities are continuing today.

14 I spoke yesterday to a tenant in
15 the Surfside Gardens development who told me that
16 currently--this is two and a half months after
17 Sandy--the electricity continues to go out several
18 hours every other day. Their heat is intermittent
19 and the hot water is tepid at best. Our client
20 didn't get any electricity restored at all until
21 December 23rd, just before Christmas. She tells
22 me that her neighbor didn't get electricity
23 restored until last week. She tells me that
24 there's widespread crime in her development due to
25 the problems with utilities.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I'm sorry.

Gentleman? Sir, who's leaving, who's walking.

When you left, you dropped your hat. I don't want you to leave without it. There you go. Sorry.

Listen, if I drop my hat, I want someone to tell me.

SONJA SHIELD: Thank you. So as you've heard, the restoration of utilities is still a live issue, but what we continue to hear from NYCHA is not much. They're not publicizing the fact that this is a continued serious problem that's making entire developments unlivable. They're treating it as a settled and closed issue.

Now, turning to the question of eviction proceedings, South Brooklyn Legal Services went to Brooklyn Housing Court and reviewed the court filings. What we found does not match with what NYCHA has been telling the Council and telling the public.

NYCHA actually continued to serve tenants with new eviction notices immediately after Sandy. On November 2nd and 3rd, they had a process server going door to door in Coney Island and in Surfside Gardens, serving tenants with

1 nonpayment eviction notices. There's something
2 wrong with our public housing authority when
3 they're prioritizing sending a process server door
4 to door to serve eviction notices over sending
5 staff door to door to help tenants.
6

7 They then announced that they would
8 stop filing new nonpayment cases against tenants
9 between November 15th and February 1st, and they'd
10 grant liberal adjournments in existing cases. Our
11 experience again shows that that's not the case.
12 They continued filing new cases against in Sandy
13 affected developments throughout November and
14 December, even after they announced the
15 moratorium.

16 For existing nonpayment cases, they
17 pushed forward and often didn't take account of
18 the rent credits that the tenants were due. We've
19 reviewed a number of nonpayment cases in the
20 Gowanus Houses where pro se tenants signed final
21 judgment stipulations that didn't appear to
22 include any rent credit for lost utilities. So
23 what that means is that the tenants could
24 conceivably be evicted for rent that they actually
25 did not owe.

1
2 Regarding the evictions, NYCHA has
3 to inform the City Council about any new cases
4 that they actually continued to file against
5 tenants in the Sandy affected developments, about
6 any judgments that they obtained that didn't give
7 the proper rent abatement credit--

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
9 I'm just going to be putting a clock because I've
10 got over 38 people. So, I mean, all of this stuff
11 is important and I will let people go a little bit
12 over, but I want to try to get as many people as
13 possible. Okay.

14 SONJA SHIELD: Sure. Two more
15 points on the evictions. They need to explain how
16 they calculated the rent abatements. They put out
17 a very long list of the places that the tenants
18 were entitled to but they never said how many days
19 they believe the tenants were entitled to those
20 credits. So that's what would be necessary to
21 enable a tenant to know whether the amount was
22 correct or not.

23 As for the termination of tenancy
24 proceedings at 250 Broadway, we don't know whether
25 they're planning on terminating any tenants for

1
2 chronic rent delinquency that's associated with
3 the rent in November and December when tenants
4 were affected by Sandy.

5 I'll turn it over to FUREE now.

6 ALVIN BARTOLOMEY: d afternoon
7 members of the New York City Council and to
8 everyone who is here. My name is Alvin
9 Bartolomey, a Red Hook West resident, Hurricane
10 Sandy survivor and co-chair of Families United for
11 Racial and Economic Equality, FUREE.

12 I have to say that I honestly
13 wasn't expecting the storm to hit us so hard, but
14 after it did, I never thought that the city and
15 NYCHA would take so long to respond to those of us
16 who were hit hard.

17 According to the Office of
18 Emergency Management, Red Hook was a Zone A. Yet,
19 we were treated as if we were Zone Not Important.
20 Like many New Yorkers, I get that there were so
21 many needs throughout the city but the utter
22 disrespect public housing residents received has
23 shown me, as a human being, that the lives of low-
24 income people are not truly valued. The proof of
25 this is evident if you were to go take a look in

1 my and other residents' apartments.

2 Before the super storm, members of
3 FUREE and other groups throughout the city pointed
4 out the need for timely repairs. The more than
5 \$6-\$7 billion worth of repairs would only get
6 worse and more expensive as time goes on. I
7 personally have had mold and crumbling walls
8 already for years, yet NYCHA has done nothing but
9 gave me a repair ticket, dated for June 2013.

10 I'm an asthmatic and in the past
11 two years, I have gotten sick just about every
12 single month to the point that the nurses and
13 front desk know me personally at my doctor's
14 office. The flooding to my first floor apartment
15 from Hurricane Sandy made both the mold and my
16 asthma worse. I had to leave my home in Red Hook
17 West not only because there wasn't going to be any
18 heat and electricity, but my own doctor told me to
19 stay out my neighborhood because most of her Red
20 Hook patients, who never had respiratory problems,
21 now do.

22 Despite all of this, Mayor
23 Bloomberg and NYCHA Officials had the nerve to say
24 that NYCHA residents who are suffering were at
25

1
2 fault because we stayed. As usual, those of us
3 who have the least resources, who are the most
4 disempowered are somehow to blame for the lack of
5 proactive planning by authorities mandated to do
6 so.

7 No, it is not our fault that we
8 didn't have any plans on how to keep our homes
9 safe from looters if we chose to leave. No, it is
10 not our fault that many of us still remembered how
11 little Hurricane Irene hit us the year before.
12 No, it is not our fault that the New York City
13 Housing Authority did not have emergency relief
14 and recovery plans in place to help residents
15 before the super storm landed. It's not
16 residents' fault that for years, NYCHA has allowed
17 the city's largest affordable housing stock to be
18 under-maintained and did not adequately utilize
19 opportunities to train and hire residents to make
20 such repairs.

21 Many of us here are still hurting.
22 We are angry. But, we're also open to coming up
23 with real solutions to help residents who are
24 suffering now, solutions for recovery that
25 includes and honors resident input and solutions

1
2 that will help to hire unemployed residents to
3 rebuild NYCHA so that we all can have quality
4 homes to live in.

5 Moving forward, I would like NYCHA
6 to consider the following and ask our City Council
7 Members to help us hold them accountable to.

8 Address mold abatement and other
9 environmental harms in affected public housing
10 developments immediately and thoroughly. Mold is
11 growing back in many apartments. The short-term
12 health impacts are real and the long-term health
13 impacts are yet to be discovered.

14 Ensure that there is equity in
15 relief and recovery efforts in public housing
16 developments.

17 Use Section 3 to adequately train
18 and hire residents to make necessary repairs
19 within their own developments. We know that some
20 of this is happening but we're concerned that as
21 usual, funding is flowing out of housing as
22 opposed to helping residents to give back to NYCHA
23 in service and rent income.

24 Be transparent with residents. If
25 you do not have a plan in place, be honest about

1
2 it and let us know when you will. If you do not
3 have enough funding to cover all of this work, be
4 honest about that. You'd be surprised how many
5 residents go to bat with state and federal
6 authorities to make sure that NYCHA gets the
7 funding it deserves.

8 Stop treating residents as tenants
9 and start treating us as human beings. Talk to
10 us, not at us.

11 Although we are all here to hold
12 NYCHA accountable to its response after Sandy, we
13 are also here to publicly challenge everyone in
14 this room, every single person in this city to
15 acknowledge that public housing is home to
16 hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. Public
17 housing is our home.

18 People forget that many NYCHA
19 residents helped build this city and this country.
20 We would be having a different kind of hearing if
21 resident engagement, transparency and the
22 preservation of public housing was a true priority
23 for NYCHA.

24 Thank you all for your time and for
25 the opportunity to share my story and my thoughts.

1
2 BEVERLY CORBIN: Hello. My name is
3 Beverly Corbin and I live in Wyckoff Gardens for
4 27 years. Wyckoff is just a block away from
5 Gowanus, where neighborhoods were left without
6 power for over ten days after Sandy. I'm here to
7 say NYCHA acted like a bully. It didn't treat
8 residents and the community with respect during
9 the Sandy relief efforts. I am a board member at
10 FUREE, Families United for Racial and Economic
11 Equality.

12 FUREE's director, Valerie Jean,
13 called me the day the hurricane hit to make sure
14 that I was all right, because I was in a
15 wheelchair and I have a child. Ms. Jean then
16 asked about the two developments around me. I
17 know the tenant association presidents at the
18 adjoining buildings, Warren Street Houses and
19 Gowanus Houses in Brooklyn. Because my
20 development wasn't hit badly and because we lived
21 in Zone B, I thought that Gowanus wasn't damaged
22 at all.

23 I eventually learned, Friday after
24 the storm, that the phones at Gowanus were not
25 working and that five buildings had no power, heat

1
2 or hot water. I contacted Gowanus TA president,
3 Ms. Scott, and had Ms. Jean and Ms. Scott talk to
4 together right that night. By the next morning,
5 less than 12 hours, FUREE mobilized hundreds of
6 volunteers, NYCHA residents, support services and
7 relief hubs based around Gowanus Community Center.

8 The first priority was to get food
9 and water to those who needed it and find out
10 which residents were homebound, elderly, sick or
11 living with infants and small children. That same
12 Saturday morning, my 10-year-old daughter and I
13 made our way. That would turn out to be 11-hour
14 shifts, from 9 in the morning until 12 midnight,
15 sometimes 1 a.m.

16 What's great with FUREE, along with
17 City Council Member Steve Levin, Assemblywoman
18 Joan Millman, and a band of people from Gowanus,
19 other developments, neighborhoods from Boerum
20 Hill, Park Slopes and other areas worked hard
21 together to make sure that people who could not
22 walk down the stairs got food, water, flashlights.
23 We also got prescriptions filled and delivered to
24 trapped tenants.

25 We know that other communities were

1
2 hit really bad, so we were happy when we found out
3 that NYCHA was coming on that Sunday night to talk
4 and help out. Well that was short lived. NYCHA
5 came, asked for our list, who needed help and
6 stated that they would send help on Monday in the
7 way of social workers, food, medical teams. That
8 never happened.

9 But we kept working for the people
10 that needed our help, even as ourselves we got ill
11 working in the cold, and even though our bodies
12 couldn't move, we kept moving.

13 Teams were built to make lunch
14 runs, dinner runs. Canvasses went door to door
15 three times a day, every day to check on
16 residents' needs. Social workers from other
17 associations came in and provided support.
18 Lawyers from South Brooklyn Legal Services came in
19 to help residents with their benefits. Nurses
20 were displaced from NYU came in to check on our
21 residents with medical needs, blood checks and
22 sugar watches.

23 Children and youth who did not have
24 to go to school came in and carried boxes, packets
25 for breakfast, lunch and dinner, handed out

1
2 groceries. One day we ran out of food and the
3 young person who worked with us gave his lunch
4 money for that week. My daughter, she gave up her
5 last \$2, but we kept moving. City Council Member
6 Levin stayed out in the street until 2 and 3:00 in
7 the morning, waiting for help to turn on the
8 lights, but no one came. We kept working.

9 Well, when the lights came on in
10 some of the buildings that following Thursday,
11 people still needed help. That was the same day,
12 11 days after the storm hit, NYCHA showed up and
13 not in a good way. They were upset that we had
14 helped residents and tried to claim thousands of
15 dollars were for food and medicine as theirs.
16 They walked through the center and didn't
17 residents standing in line for replacements of
18 food that had spoiled. They forgot human beings
19 who publicly showed their vulnerability by being
20 there to get help from their residents.

21 Our relief efforts were based in a
22 building that was a community center that was
23 mostly vacant for years. After they showed up and
24 left, they told us they wanted us out. The sad
25 thing about it was that they were looking at us

2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16

17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24

25

1 building that was largely not used, but it was
2 needed to rent out parties. All of that for NYCHA
3 to show power to their residents. NYCHA could
4 have helped their own residents after the storm
5 when others came in and do the work that they
6 should do. The least they can do is support work.

7
8 I close by saying I hope all the
9 higher ups slept good in their beds, had
10 medication that they needed. I hope that their
11 children had hot meals and a warm bed during and
12 after the storm. Hundreds of residents all over
13 the city did not have that luxury. I ask City
14 Council to hold NYCHA accountable for the lack of
15 the humanity.

16 We all know storms are going to get
17 worse each year. NYCHA should work more
18 proactively with local community and faith-based
19 organizations to provide relief. NYCHA should
20 ensure that they have adequate plans in place for
21 the residents. Resident needs and engagement
22 should be directly and respected in the relief
23 efforts within their own developments.

24 I want to thank you for this time
25 and this opportunity to share my story and my

1
2 recommendations. Thank you.

3 DEEDRA CHEATHAM: Good afternoon
4 members of the New York City Council and all who
5 are here today, and a special thank you to Steve
6 Levin for still being by our side. My name is
7 Deedra Cheatham. I am a FUREE member and I also
8 helped lead relief efforts at Gowanus Houses.

9 When Hurricane Sandy hit, the
10 residents of Gowanus Houses, they were left to
11 fend for themselves. They were left without
12 adequate tools to endure such a traumatic
13 situation. I was one of the many volunteers that
14 assisted in the recovery efforts held at the
15 Gowanus Community Center. I worked with FUREE
16 from the first day of setup, from the first day we
17 set up relief efforts until the last day we were
18 told to leave the community center.

19 The residents of the community
20 faced many unanswered issues such as why the power
21 went off in their development, since we were not
22 in the Zone A. Why anyone from NYCHA was unable
23 to answer any of their questions with a concrete
24 answer. When will the power, heat and hot water
25 go back on? How do we make sure this doesn't

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

happen again?

The main two issues we faced during relief work at the Gowanus Community Center was trying to calm the residents in the five affected buildings and let them know that they were not alone. Another issue we faced was how to get food, light, water and the essential items that they would need to help sustain them until power returned, whenever that was.

Nevertheless, we managed to accomplish these goals as well as deal with many other situations that arose, such as insulin dependent residents receiving their medication, ensuring that they had adequate amounts to hold them over. We worked with local doctors, pharmacists to assist with this.

There were many issues we had to deal with. We walked up flights of stairs in dark buildings with flashlights to ensure that every elderly and homebound resident that was left in the dark knew that we would go through hell and high water to get it for them.

I saw many residents that were scared because they didn't have any information as

1
2 to when the power would be restored, if ever at
3 all. I walked into houses that had children in
4 them, who were scared because it was dark, they
5 were hungry and it was cold, not to mention, they
6 were all sick.

7 Many of the residents whose
8 households I went in during this extensive relief
9 work were just glad to know that there was
10 somebody that cared about them and their
11 wellbeing. I also let them know I was a medical
12 assistant and that I could assist them with taking
13 their blood pressure, giving them their asthma
14 treatments, injecting them with their insulin, all
15 while using a flashlight to provide some light
16 source.

17 During that time, some questions
18 remain. Where was NYCHA? Why, as their landlord,
19 were they not giving them updates, knocking on
20 their doors to ensure that they were okay? Why
21 wasn't Gowanus Houses prepared for something like
22 this?

23 I come to you today and urge you
24 that we implement a system in which each
25 development we have trained first responders on

1
2 the ground to assist with horrific situations like
3 Hurricane Sandy. That we hold storm prep classes
4 in our community centers to show residents how to
5 prepare go bags, what to do, where to turn for
6 help. I question why isn't the Gowanus Houses in
7 Zone A, and ultimately help change this. I beg
8 you to help change this.

9 Hurricane Sandy was something we
10 could not prevent from happening. But if we are
11 all trained, if we keep the lines of communication
12 open with our residents, if we just treat
13 residents as if they were our own family, then I'm
14 sure that the residents of Gowanus Houses and the
15 11217 zip code would have been prepared and ready
16 to take on the disaster and feel comfortable to
17 know that they would not be possible victims of a
18 Hurricane Katrina or any other disaster yet to
19 come.

20 Thank you and thank you to FUREE
21 for being the glue that helped keep Gowanus
22 Community Center together. Again, thank you,
23 Steve Levin for standing with me until 3:00 in the
24 morning, in the cold, on Con Edison's back.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you,

1
2 Deedra.

3 PEGGY EARISMA: Hi. My name is
4 Peggy Earisma. I'm also from Legal Services NYC.
5 I'm the director of the Manhattan program. I
6 myself, along with some of my attorneys were on
7 the Lower East Side at the end of that week of the
8 hurricane, along with Council Member Mendez,
9 walking up the stairs in buildings without power,
10 where elderly residents, disabled residents have
11 been left for several days at that point without
12 food or water.

13 I was also in the GOLES office as
14 people were running up to the office and reporting
15 on the needs of elderly and disabled folks, could
16 we send someone up to check on them, on their
17 uncle, on their cousin, on their friend, because
18 they could not get through to them and they didn't
19 know what condition they were in. One of the
20 needs, and I think many people have talked about
21 this, is the need for emergency medical folks to
22 respond. Diabetics need insulin. It needs to be
23 refrigerated. There needs to be a supply brought
24 up.

25 One of my attorneys approached one

1 of the NYCHA employees who was standing at one of
2 the projects and said, you know, do you have a
3 plan, do you have a list, what are you doing, and
4 was told explicitly, that is not our job, that is
5 your job. So I appreciate there were many
6 dedicated NYCHA employees but there also was not
7 in any way shape or form an adequate response to
8 NYCHA to the needs of people.

10 I sat here and listened very
11 carefully to the testimony of Mr. House, and I
12 struck at one point he said, we are primarily
13 landlords and so our first responsibility was to
14 assess our buildings. What was left out of that
15 was what should have been our first responsibility
16 should have been to assess the emergency needs of
17 our tenants who were in our buildings.

18 So I think we've heard a lot about
19 that need. Going forward, we have some
20 recommendations. A lot of folks have mentioned
21 the need for a plan for NYCHA to address the needs
22 of their most vulnerable residents. There has
23 also been a discussion of a need for NYCHA to have
24 much better communication with their tenants and
25 the natural problems that arise when communication

1
2 is lacking.

3 Even more significantly, NYCHA as
4 the manager of thousands and thousands of units in
5 buildings that are on the waterfront in this city,
6 has to look to the future in the same way that
7 owners and managers of upper and middle income
8 buildings are looking to the future. They have to
9 consider moving essential mechanical equipment out
10 of basements. They have to get portable
11 generators so that hallway lights, at a very
12 least, emergency hallway lights are running in
13 buildings and one or more elevators are running
14 for their disabled tenants and water is being
15 pumped so toilets can be flushed.

16 So we urge, we urge NYCHA to look
17 forward and treat their tenants the same way as we
18 see in the newspapers they're making plans in
19 luxury buildings and middle income buildings so
20 that if there is another hurricane--and we all
21 fear that there could be--that their tenants are
22 protected as well.

23 Lastly, we thank the City Council
24 for their efforts in addressing these important
25 issues. We urge the Council to continue to have

oversight over NYCHA to ensure that these mistakes are not repeated in the future. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. Now, you're Deedra, right? Valerie Jean, is she part of this panel? Excuse me?

[Background noise]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay, if you want to make a quick statement. If you want to let us move on to the next panel, that's also fine. Can I just ask, where is NYCHA? Who is here from NYCHA? There you go. Thank you. Just making sure. Thank you. Valerie, are you going to come on?

[Pause]

VALERIE JEAN: Good afternoon everyone, ladies and gentlemen of the City Council and everyone that's here. I was trying to not get on because I think I'm coming down with the flu. I just essentially want to support what our members have said here today, which is the need for the New York City Housing Authority to treat its residents as human beings. But also, you know, to be the kind of authority that is centered

1
2 in preserving and protecting public housing as the
3 largest affordable housing stock in New York City.
4 Particularly during a time where we see the
5 impacts of the economic recession and knowing with
6 how luxury development is occurring throughout the
7 city, that it's getting harder and harder for
8 families to afford a decent place to live.

9 We also, you know just
10 organizationally want to put out there that we
11 don't want NYCHA to go back to the way it was
12 before the storm, with many backlog repairs, with
13 residents not hearing back from Housing Authority
14 until months later in some really cool PR spin
15 that they put out. We do want the Housing
16 Authority to be that model of public housing that
17 it used to be, right, that is there, that is
18 quality housing, that is helping its residents to
19 be sustainable. That cannot happen if NYCHA
20 continues to act the way that it does. The gag
21 orders, it's not a rumor. You know, not talking
22 to residents, not utilizing TPF monies to really
23 train residents to take leadership roles that can
24 in turn help people. You know, if evacuation
25 orders came from a neighbor as opposed to a NYCHA

official, more people might have left their homes.

That's all I want to say. I submitted my written testimony with policy recommendations moving forward regarding this, but I really want other public housing residents to tell their stories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. So now the second panel, please come on up. I had told you if you were on the third panel, that's a big long list, and so you should know who you are. If you need me to go through it again. The fourth panel is going to be Reginald Bowman from the Citywide Council of Presidents for NYCHA; Nancy Ortiz, TA President of Vladeck Houses; and Florence Hunter, Chelsea Houses President. So you're going to be the fourth panel, okay. So you can move on over here. Okay, second panel, go.

ROBYN HILLMAN-HARRIGAN: Hi. Thank you for having me here. Thank you for everyone who stayed. I am from the Rockaway Rescue Alliance and our main project is called the Shore Soup Project. I'm a resident of Rockaway and a small business owner. I had a business on the boardwalk. I was there during the storm. I was

1
2 there the day after the storm. There was no
3 presence from FEMA, the Red Cross or--

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
5 Excuse me. Can we have a little quiet, because
6 it's reverberating? Thank you. Go ahead.

7 ROBYN HILLMAN-HARRIGAN: There was
8 no presence from any institution clearly there in
9 those first few days. So people like myself,
10 other residents, we felt that there was a lack of
11 leadership, something needed to be done.

12 The second that we went out in the
13 street and started giving out hot food and going
14 into NYCHA buildings and knocking on doors and
15 asking people what they needed and bringing hot
16 food and bringing water and bringing flashlights
17 and batteries, other people joined us. There were
18 lots of volunteers that streamed in from
19 throughout the city and a lot of residents of
20 Rockaway. We did this without money, without
21 resources, without being a nonprofit that already
22 existed that had funding.

23 So it feels like some of the
24 statements that were made that NYCHA was doing
25 door knocking and that NYCHA was providing these

1
2 services, that's not what we experienced in any
3 way. It's not what we saw. We were going through
4 dark hallways. We ran into many people who had
5 not left their apartments, that were living in the
6 dark. The hallways were dark. They had no heat.
7 They had no electricity. You know, some people
8 who had gas were boiling water to stay warm.

9 You still see this today in
10 Rockaway. We're still giving out meals because
11 there is still people who you could see how
12 freezing they are. You could see that they have
13 coughs. I have had that cough. Everyone has
14 heard about the Rockaway cough. You know, there's
15 dust in the air. There's mold throughout. It's
16 not a healthy environment and everybody is
17 experiencing this.

18 So it's interesting to hear that
19 NYCHA feels that the mold has been remediated
20 when, you know--and the 25 apartments had mold
21 when it seems that every other building in
22 Rockaway that was flooded is taking extreme steps
23 to actually gut their own buildings because mold
24 cannot be remediated without actually getting the
25 mold out. It's not just about spraying some

1
2 bleach on. You know, it's a very difficult
3 process. So I'm a little confused by that.

4 I have to say that, you know,
5 people in the buildings really helped each other.
6 People came to us and said we know people on this
7 floor. We know this elderly person. We know
8 other people that need help. Give us more
9 supplies, we'll give them to other people. This
10 continues to happen. So there's a great community
11 and there are a lot of people that want to improve
12 the situation for themselves, improve the
13 situation for each other, but we all need help to
14 do that. We need resources. We need cooperation.
15 We need information.

16 We've been asking for this list
17 that supposedly exists of where all the people who
18 are elderly are, of all the people with special
19 needs who are homebound. We haven't gotten the
20 list. We will use that list if we do get it. So
21 I would like to--

22 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
23 See, this is why I'm saying because NYCHA cannot
24 give out that list for reasons of confidentiality.
25 Not even to me.

ROBYN HILLMAN-HARRIGAN: Right.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So at some point, because they could not get everywhere, they shared some of the list. But they really can't. That's why I'm saying the resident associations need to apply for the tenant participation funds. NYCHA cannot apply for it. The residents have to apply for it for their development. They should start to get a list. I'm going to work with the residents in my district to develop that list, irrespective of tenant participation funds because I also have to do it in the rest of my district, not just in my NYCHA developments. But I just want to make sure that--there are reasons that they're not giving the list out because, you know, confidentiality.

ROBYN HILLMAN-HARRIGAN: Right. I understand that. But maybe the Council Members who represent Rockaway could work on that or residents can be asked to help in this process. I'm not a resident of a NYCHA building but I would like to help in this process and so would my organization. I know a lot of the other groups would as well. So we would just ask if we can be

1 included in that process and if we can have that
2 information shared with us when it becomes
3 available.
4

5 GIGI LI: Good afternoon. My name
6 is Gigi Li, and I'm chair of Manhattan's Community
7 Board 3. I want to begin by thanking Chair Mendez
8 for holding this hearing and for the opportunity
9 to testify.

10 CB3 stretches from the Brooklyn
11 Bridge to 14th Street on Manhattan's east side,
12 and includes the neighborhoods of Chinatown and
13 the Lower East Side. A substantial portion of CB3
14 was identified to be in Zone A. After Community
15 Board 11, which is East Harlem, CB3 represents the
16 second highest number of NYCHA households in
17 Manhattan, at just over 13,300. It appears that
18 over 90% of those units were either in Zone A or
19 Zone B.

20 Given this, I'd like to offer
21 several highlights. One, there was a very early
22 and succinct need for Spanish and Chinese
23 interpretation and translation. Over 80% of CB3's
24 NYCHA residents identify as Puerto Rican, Latino,
25 or Asian. There is a clear need that all

information from NYCHA needs to be in all three languages of English, Chinese, and Spanish.

Before the storm arrived, I volunteered as a door knocker at Smith Houses, encouraging families to evacuate in teams with trilingual language capacity. It became clear to us very quickly that the non-English speakers were considerably less informed.

Throughout the process after the storm, Chinese interpretation occurred because volunteers from the community worked with elected officials and their staff to cover high need areas but in a very limited capacity. Also, as MREs began to be distributed, there was also no translation and interpretation to those who could not read English as to what they were, how to heat them. Contrary to some, in CB3, there is also a good chance that your neighbor also doesn't speak English.

Secondly, support for homebound, medically fragile, and individuals with disabilities, I'm not going to go over that because it's been covered and I want to give more time to residents.

One thing that I think would be really helpful is developing a buddy system within each of the buildings as residents know each other. A lot of the family members live within the same building. In some ways, the list that we talk about that can't be handed out, everyone inside in the brain sort of knows a part of that list.

Lastly, I want to talk about the coordination of relief efforts. The first two days after the storm, there was no information. When assistance finally arrived, it was extremely disorganized. Much like when there's a fire, there's a protocol of where to evacuate, where to meet up to see if you have coworkers or residents that are missing. It would be great for each development to identify such a location and offer regular updates at a certain time so all residents would have a place to go. Those places could also serve as relief centers and distribution sites. Also, for agencies and elected officials to always remember to utilize their community board.

Lastly, I feel like having volunteered at both developments that have tenant

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16

17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

1
2 destroyed homes, overwhelmed makeshift shelters,
3 elderly and handicapped public housing residents
4 who did not have access to food or water and
5 weren't able to get down the stairs in the absence
6 of a working elevator.

7 For weeks after the storm, we
8 mobilized 500 volunteers each day from five
9 canvassing headquarter sites throughout the
10 impacted areas. We coordinated with OEM, NYC
11 Service, NYCHA and other city agencies to resolve
12 the problems that we encountered, turning around
13 food distribution and other volunteer projects in
14 many cases overnight.

15 In one example, in the days after
16 the storm, NYCHA informed us about elderly and
17 handicapped residents at a large NYCHA housing
18 development in Arverne, Queens, who were in need
19 of food, water and blankets. Within 24 hours, a
20 group of New York Cares volunteers, led by three
21 NYPD officers and one NYCHA official were at the
22 development, carrying cases of water and supplies
23 up eight flights of steps and through pitch-black
24 dank hallways, like many of you here did.

25 Overall, NYPD, National Guard and

1 the city staff working with NYCHA were helpful in
2 escorting volunteers into public housing.

3 However, in some situations, escorts were required
4 and there were not enough escorts for the number
5 of volunteers. So in one example, we would have
6 80 volunteers available but at any given moment
7 only 5 to 10 of them could get into the housing
8 because escorts were required.
9

10 So there was a great amount of
11 staff, if you will, human capital capacity to help
12 and there were some logjams there in terms of
13 allowing the help into the building. In those
14 cases, many of our volunteers would then go
15 canvass in the neighborhoods and not necessarily
16 at NYCHA sites, but to residents in the
17 neighborhoods.

18 I would finish up just by saying
19 that we value our partnership with the city
20 agencies and NYCHA. And we do think there's an
21 opportunity here to think about how volunteers--
22 and we've heard how many folks volunteer after a
23 disaster--how that coordination could be more
24 effective and how we can get many more of the
25 people who want to help into the sites that need

1
2 them most. Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

4 Okay, the third panel, and I'm going to go through
5 that list because it's a long list. The third
6 panel is Lara Weibyen, Evangelean Pugh--just as
7 soon as you get up, just take a seat and get ready
8 to give testimony. Then this is a long panel, so
9 if you could just sit on the side and then we'll
10 get you all on. Ann Valdez, Edward Alexander,
11 Gloria Wilson, Gilbert Alicea and Emily
12 Rosenblatt. Just remember to identify yourself
13 for the record. Okay, let's go. Thank you.
14 Whoever is ready; just grab the microphone.

15 Let me just get onboard what the
16 fifth panel. The fifth panel will be Judith
17 Goldiner, Lucy Newman, Harvey Epstein, Ann Dibble,
18 and Julie Russell. Those are all Legal Aid/Legal
19 Services providers. Okay.

20 LARA WEIBYEN: Sorry, my voice is a
21 little bit gone. I'm Lara Weibyen. I'm with a
22 group called People's Relief, which was an ad hoc
23 grassroots canvassing effort in Coney Island that
24 was focused on identifying primarily homebound
25 elderly and disabled residents and connecting them

1
2 with a team of professionally trained medical
3 volunteers that we were working with.

4 So I just wanted to start by
5 telling you a little bit about what we saw when we
6 arrived in Coney Island, which was a week after
7 the storm hit. We encountered many elderly and
8 disabled people who had been trapped an entire
9 week, because their elevators weren't working,
10 hadn't left their apartments in a whole week.
11 Many people were extremely angry and afraid. The
12 scale of the neglect was truly appalling, although
13 I should say it wasn't surprising because there's
14 really no question in my mind that the scale of
15 neglect had to do with the fact that the people
16 affected were mostly poor immigrants and people of
17 color. I don't think this could have happened in
18 different kinds of neighborhoods.

19 So to borrow a phrase that I heard
20 somewhere that I thought summed this up pretty
21 accurately, poverty is sort of a slow hurricane.

22 To give you a sense of the
23 emergency needs that we encountered on top of the
24 permanent emergency that was happening in the
25 public housing. For example, we met a woman who

1
2 was supposed to be getting dialysis three times a
3 week and wasn't able to get out of her apartment.
4 So she was getting blood poisoning. We met a man
5 who was supposed to be getting cancer treatments
6 daily. By the time our medical team got to him, he
7 had missed two weeks of daily cancer treatments.
8 He and his wife were at each other's throats in
9 panic. It was really awful.

10 We encountered a group of teenagers
11 evacuating their grandmother in a kitchen chair
12 down ten flights of stairs because she didn't have
13 anybody around who could help her get groceries
14 and couldn't get around.

15 I'm grateful that only one NYCHA
16 resident died in the immediate aftermath of the
17 storm, but I also think it's important to note
18 that if residents and volunteers hadn't intervened
19 in the situation, it could have been dozens, truly
20 dozens, and I think it would have been.

21 So then there's the question of why
22 did this happen? Why did this horrible situation
23 happen? So giving the city and the federal
24 government the benefit of the doubt, which I'm not
25 terribly inclined to do, but assuming their

1
2 intention was not actually to leave thousands of
3 poor immigrants and people of color to die in
4 their apartments, my assessment is that the
5 problems were as follows. Basically, the
6 government agencies and large organizations did
7 not communicate at all with residents about what
8 their needs were. So they came in and they parked
9 their vans on the street. They dumped a bunch of
10 supplies in a parking lot that was not terribly
11 close to the public housing. So the problem was
12 really not that there weren't enough resources in
13 the neighborhood, but that they just weren't
14 getting distributed appropriately. There was no
15 apparatus for the appropriate distribution and of
16 course, that's a problem in our society at large.

17 The other problem was that the
18 people who were actually doing the needs
19 assessment who were residents themselves who were
20 religious groups, grassroots volunteer groups like
21 ours, we really suffered from a lack of capacity.
22 So a lot of people were assessing the needs but
23 nobody knew what to do about it.

24 This is especially true with regard
25 to the medical situation. When we got there, we

1
2 were lucky to have a medical team partnering with
3 us, and so we actually took on the backlogs of two
4 other organizations that had been recording urgent
5 medical needs but didn't know what to do about
6 them. So for a period of about a week, our
7 medical team was kind of just addressing these
8 sort of needs that other canvassers and residents
9 had logged.

10 To speak also to the canvassing
11 effort, I do have strong questions about NYCHA's
12 claims that it conducted a mass canvassing effort.
13 I and my sister and my sister's partner and our
14 friends were there every day for a number of weeks
15 and I swear I did not see it, nor did any of the
16 volunteers that we worked with or the residents we
17 worked with. We worked with Ann and Evangelean
18 and they didn't see it either. So either it was
19 nonexistent and it's a fabrication or it was very
20 small and the statement that it was a mass effort
21 is overstated. Or it was extremely late. I leave
22 room for the possibility that there was a mass
23 effort maybe three weeks after the storm. But
24 really, at that point it's sort of what's the
25 point.

1
2 So I think that NYCHA should make
3 publicly available details about when their mass
4 effort started, how many canvassers were sent out,
5 what kinds of information they actually gathered
6 while they were canvassing and whether or how they
7 were actually able to do anything with that
8 information and connect residents with the
9 resources they needed.

10 I actually don't want to dwell too
11 much on the problems with NYCHA's response,
12 because actually NYCHA's response to my mind
13 wasn't really any worse than the city, the federal
14 government and large organizations such as the Red
15 Cross.

16 So I just wanted to close with a
17 constructive suggestion, which is that I'd like to
18 see NYCHA doing what our scrappy volunteer effort
19 ended up doing about two weeks after the storm,
20 which is when FEMA and the Red Cross and
21 representatives from the Mayor's Office started
22 coming to us for information and direction, which
23 is very surreal. The Red Cross and somebody from
24 Bloomberg's office asking us what they were
25 supposed to do in the situation. So what we ended

1
2 up doing was serving as a liaison between
3 residents and the organizations and agencies that
4 had resources.

5 So I would suggest that NYCHA find
6 a way of working with residents to assess the
7 needs building by building and make sure that
8 that--

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
10 I'm going to need you to wrap up, because I still
11 have many people. What I do want to do is I would
12 like to meet with the groups and the residents,
13 and I know you Ann, so maybe you can get a group
14 and we can talk about really in a lot of detail
15 what happened in Coney Island. Maybe you can take
16 me on a tour. NYCHA took me on a tour, but then
17 you can take me on a tour and we can meet some of
18 your residents. Okay? Next?

19 ANN VALDEZ: I'm sorry. I don't
20 want to jump ahead; it's just that I have a
21 meeting now with Commissioner Robert Doar, so I
22 got to really run out of here. So I just want to
23 say this quickly, because you and I have spoken
24 about these issues before. Plenty has been said
25 about what hasn't been done. Let me just put it

3 You already know my name. My name
4 is Ann Valdez, and I'm a member and leader at
5 Community Voices Heard. I live in Gravesend
6 Houses. I'm a third generation there. I live
7 there with my 14-year-old son Brian Rosa, who
8 actually has done more for the NYCHA residents in
9 Coney Island than NYCHA themselves did. He went
10 door knocking with People's Relief, bringing food
11 to the elderly over in Haber Houses to make sure
12 that they had what they needed. I'm very proud of
13 him. He did a lot. The same thing in the
14 evacuation centers. He was all over the place,
15 making sure everybody got what they needed.

Hurricane Sandy tore up the community that I have called home for over 40 years and the community that my family has lived in as a third generation. What I am here to talk about today is the devastation that Sandy brought on to my community and what we can do moving forward. Today in Coney Island, we are still suffering from inconsistent heat, hot water, and of course mold, mold and more mold and mold on top of the mold that was already there.

Also, the fallen trees. The trees that fell, NYCHA finally picked up most of those trees and made them into mulch but they didn't remove the mulch. Some of the mulch is sitting very close to the developments or in the developments and people are afraid because they see puffs of smoke coming out of it. NYCHA says it's okay.

This is of course goes without saying is making life more difficult for all residents of public housing and that already have been waiting for more than two years to get basic repairs. I myself a year and a half ago put in a

1
2 complaint for two broken walls in my house, where
3 you can actually see the concrete. I was given an
4 appointment for a year and a half later, for
5 December 18, 2012. No one showed up. Now they've
6 finally showed up and now they want to do it
7 Saturday and Sunday. I don't know if they're
8 going to show up.

9 As Lara has spoken, if it wasn't
10 for Occupy Sandy and People's Relief for making
11 the knocking on the doors, door to door, making
12 sure everybody was okay, I tell you, you would
13 have had many more people dead because no one came
14 from NYCHA to see how anyone was doing.

15 I have a neighbor that lives two
16 doors over. The woman is a very large woman.
17 She's very sick. She's in a wheelchair. We live
18 on the sixth floor. No one came to see if she was
19 okay. But while we were having a conversation in
20 the hallway, someone did come off the elevator and
21 served her with a paper for an eviction, which I
22 had to go to a meeting to help them to realize
23 what's going on. They paid attention and they
24 took care of the problem and made sure that she
25 wasn't going to be evicted. But had I not done

1
2 that, the woman would have not known where to go.
3 There's no way in a wheelchair at that time in
4 November that she could have gotten to 141
5 Livingston to plead her case. No way.

6 Community Voices Heard recommends
7 an oversight body to monitor NYCHA's repair and
8 recovery work, both recent and longer term. Every
9 time NYCHA says something is done, it is most
10 likely not functioning or is only partially done,
11 including putting back the heat, hot water, and
12 electricity.

13 Now, moving forward, we'd like to
14 make sure that the recovery and rebuilding jobs
15 available are widely publicized and there are
16 enough jobs allocated for public housing residents

17 Establish a centralized job
18 training and hiring center in each affected zone
19 and one city-wide. We would like to see long-term
20 unemployed individuals and public assistance
21 recipients as well to also be eligible for these
22 jobs, because they totally forget about us. I
23 only have one little statement left.

24 Post-Sandy recovery funds should be
25 planned and budgeted in a participatory budgeting

1
2 process as a way to have public housing residents
3 have a seat at the table, and let local effected
4 communities decide what spending priorities are in
5 our communities and truly make our community
6 voices heard. Thank you very much for letting me
7 speak. I'm sorry I have to run.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
9 Next? Pull the microphone in front of you please
10 so we can capture your testimony.

11 EVANGELEAN PUGH: My name is
12 Evangelean Pugh. I work also with Community
13 Voices Heard and with Women's Press Collective,
14 Occupy Sandy, City Harvest and Still no NYCHA.

15 I'm still devastated because I live
16 in Coney Island Houses, which is Zone A. I was
17 thinking that I was okay because I work with the
18 tenant association. I'm the secretary for the
19 tenant association. But during the storm, the
20 tenant association president made it very clear
21 that NYCHA wanted to get rid of the relief
22 efforts. So the community room that we were using
23 to redistribute food, food that we had solicited
24 from different organizations to give out to the
25 buildings. We did the canvassing. These

1 organizations, they did the canvassing with me and
2 my family. The results was we came up with a list
3 of people who needed to be helped and who we could
4 actually help and some people we couldn't help.
5 There were people that were able to get out of the
6 building and those people who had to service
7 themselves. People that could not get out of the
8 buildings and who had children, these were the
9 people that we were trying to service.
10

11 The community room that we had was
12 one small room inside the building. We would get
13 the supplies in there and hold it there until we
14 can get it back out to the people who needed it.
15 The tenant association president came in and she
16 made life very difficult. She kept disappearing
17 with the key. She also would like if we have a
18 meeting coming up, she would take the key and run
19 off. We had to go and find her or wait until she
20 decided to show up.

21 Finally, the end result was the
22 last day that we actually had supplies there, she
23 came in with the locksmith from Housing and they
24 changed the locks on the door, telling us that we
25 had to lock everything in the door or get it out

1
2 right then and there. We had ten minutes. We had
3 about 50 or 60 boxes. We had to remove everything
4 from the room and go downstairs in the cold and
5 give the stuff out to people.

6 I don't understand that. I don't
7 understand why New York City Housing would be
8 against us getting necessities for people. This
9 was not for profit. Nobody was gaining anything
10 from it. I'm disabled. Yet and still I was
11 willing to work there and redistribute food,
12 redistribute clothes with everybody else. It was
13 a hard task. New York City Housing made it that
14 much harder.

15 The basic repairs, we haven't had
16 basic repairs in years. I made ten tickets out at
17 the beginning of last week for a broken toilet, a
18 leaking toilet, broken doors, doorknob. Last
19 year, I came to a hearing and the doorknob, the
20 door was replaced. There's no cylinder or
21 something inside the door, so the knob just turns.
22 So what I have to do is tie a string on the
23 outside of the door, attached it to the inside of
24 the door to pull the door open. This is a fixed
25 door.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: This is your
current condition?

EVANGELEAN PUGH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: What is your
name?

EVANGELEAN PUGH: Evangelean Pugh.
I'm in Coney Island Houses, Surfside.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I want your
address when you're finished, at the end of the
hearing. I want your address.

EVANGELEAN PUGH: Okay. The stove
and the oven is not working. I was told there's
no pieces for it. That there's no piece for the
door. There's no piece for the toilet. No basic
repairs. So now we're expected to believe that
Housing is going to do this phenomenal job and do
all these repairs and fix everything. They
haven't fixed anything in so long, it's like we've
gotten used to living in substandard conditions.
Even to try to do the basic things, it's very
difficult to live like this. I pay rent like
everybody else. I may not pay a whole lot of
rent. You know, I'm not rich. I'm paying
according to what my salary is. But these are

1
2 basic things. I don't think it's too much to ask
3 for.

4 I would like to say thank you to
5 everybody who came out and that did help and, you
6 know, the time that was spent, the canvassing, the
7 food, everything. I'm very grateful for that.
8 But the ones that really should have helped, the
9 ones that we expected at least if they didn't do
10 anything, not to stand in our way of us doing
11 something. We were very active. We had
12 organizations. Like I said, Occupy Sandy, City
13 Harvest--I'm sorry--People's Relief.

14 We had organizations that were
15 willing to do things, and to have this little
16 woman standing in the doorway telling people that
17 we don't need it, we don't need volunteers, why is
18 all this food coming here. I don't understand why
19 she was acting the way she was acting. I don't
20 know why she went back to Housing with reports
21 about, you know, about the food distribution. I
22 don't know why the door was locked, why we had to
23 do this out in the cold.

24 I'm just looking for some kind of
25 change to be made. If they're not going to help

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

us, at least allow us to do what we need to do,
and hopefully, before the next disaster hits.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Next?

Everybody just make your way on there. Grab the
microphone. Easy peasy, get on board. Gilbert,
you're not testifying?

GILBERT ALICEA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: You're
Gilbert?

GILBERT ALICEA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Hold it.
Someone is missing here. Edward Alexander? Is
Edward Alexander here? Gloria Wilson? Gilbert
Alicea and Emilee. Okay.

GILBERT ALICEA: My name is Gilbert
Alicea. I'm a resident of Jacob Riis Houses on
the Lower East Side and member of GOLES, the Good
Old Lower East Side. I appreciate the opportunity
to testify today on NYCHA's response to Hurricane
Sandy, which I experienced directly as a resident
of a building that is located immediately next to
the East River.

NYCHA came through the buildings
and told people to evacuate. I might just add

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

22

23

24

25

1
2 on her. I might just add that this is a wonderful
3 human being that I personally know for the last
4 three decades, and she happens to be legally blind
5 because of her diabetic condition. The people who
6 did come to provide supplies and medical care were
7 from community organizations like GOLES, the Good
8 Old Lower East Side

9 Like all of downtown, my building
10 was without power from Monday through the Friday
11 after the storm, due to the blowout at the Con Ed
12 plant, which is so close to where I live I heard
13 it happen. The power was restored on Friday, and
14 the water came back on at the same time, but we
15 were still without heat for several days after
16 that. Heating is still inconsistent today. Some
17 lines have heat, while others do not.

18 After the storm, NYCHA workers came
19 door to door to check if people had mold. I
20 commend NYCHA for at least taking the step to take
21 an inventory of who has mold in their apartment,
22 but the fact remains that mold is still an issue.
23 The health implications of mold can be very severe
24 and long lasting, and if more steps aren't taken
25 to remove all of the mold from the apartments,

1
2 from inside the walls, and from the basement where
3 utilities are stored, we may have a serious health
4 crisis on our hands.

5 Thank you again for holding this
6 hearing and for your time and consideration.

7 EMILEE ROSENBLATT: My name is
8 Emilee Rosenblatt. I'll be reading the testimony
9 of Damaris Reyes.

10 Good afternoon. My name is Damaris
11 Reyes, and I'm the Executive Director of GOLES,
12 Good Old Lower East Side, a 35-year-old membership
13 organization dedicated to tenant rights, economic
14 equality, and community revitalization. As a
15 pioneer and a leading voice in public housing
16 issues, both locally and nationally, we reach more
17 than 10,000 people every year with our work.

18 Hurricane Sandy's impact on our
19 beloved community was swift, immense, and
20 overwhelming. Within hours of the storm's
21 arrival, a storm surge brought the East River
22 cascading through the neighborhood up almost to
23 Avenue B where the GOLES office is located.
24 Hundreds of buildings flooded, including my own in
25 Baruch Houses, a NYCHA development immediately

1
2 adjacent to the East River on the Lower East Side.
3 Then, the power went out in residential and
4 commercial buildings below 39th Street, leaving
5 many, including my family, without heat, water,
6 and any means of communication.

7 GOLES' relief efforts started as
8 soon as the storm hit, with the staff residing in
9 the community assessing needs and providing
10 support to residents. Within the first days after
11 the storm, we developed and implemented a strategy
12 that enabled us to focus on assisting the most
13 vulnerable folks, trapped in their homes without
14 electricity, food, or water.

15 For 11 days straight after
16 Hurricane Sandy hit, GOLES managed a massive
17 relief effort, mobilizing 3,000 volunteers and
18 fielding thousands of donations that reached more
19 than 15,000 residents, approximately 80 percent of
20 them in NYCHA developments. GOLES' staff and
21 volunteers walked up 20 plus flights of stairs in
22 some high-rise buildings to provide residents with
23 the basic necessities and emergency information.

24 We canvassed the neighborhood to
25 assess who needed our help, delivered thousands of

1
2 bags of food, bottles of water, blankets,
3 flashlights, batteries, and candles. We brought
4 food and water to residents with limited mobility
5 and helped get other residents medical attention.

6 Members of my staff living outside
7 the LES traveled for nearly three hours to get to
8 GOLES so that their skills could be utilized. We
9 worked in our offices by candlelight before
10 electricity returned and, then, for weeks after,
11 without consistent heat, phone service, or
12 internet.

13 Having lived through these
14 challenges myself on the ground, I want to
15 acknowledge the enormity of the task that the New
16 York City Housing Authority faced as an agency,
17 taking much brunt of the storm's impact on the
18 city's housing stock and tackling challenges that
19 it maybe never imagined it would face. On certain
20 aspects of NYCHA's response, I commend their work.

21 However, that does not negate what
22 thousands of NYCHA residents lived through,
23 without services and consistent communication from
24 the Housing Authority, and many residents facing
25 tremendous financial and personal hardship as a

1
2 result of the storm. I would like to take the
3 opportunity to touch on a few key points regarding
4 these aspects of NYCHA's response to Hurricane
5 Sandy.

6 The first issue I would like to
7 address pertains to communication. I would
8 characterize coordination between NYCHA and groups
9 and agencies providing immediate relief as unclear
10 at best. NYCHA did not communicate at all with
11 many of the community organizations on the ground,
12 providing immediate relief. This, at times, led
13 to a less than efficient distribution of donated
14 resources.

15 Everyone knew that, on the Lower
16 East Side, GOLES staff and volunteers were
17 climbing stairs in dark buildings with flashlights
18 and the supplies people needed-and groups just
19 like us around the city were the ones doing it in
20 their own neighborhoods. Thankfully, I'm from the
21 Lower East Side, and so is most of my staff, so we
22 know the neighborhood well enough to know, without
23 power or phones or internet, the addresses of
24 NYCHA's senior buildings and other places where we
25 knew we had to send volunteers to make sure that

1 the most vulnerable people got what they needed.

2 I don't even want to imagine the
3 kinds of tragedies that could've occurred without
4 this expertise. If NYCHA would have communicated
5 with first responders to share important
6 information including where to locate seniors, the
7 disabled, and other vulnerable populations, this
8 grave risk could have been avoided.

9 Secondly, NYCHA's communication
10 with residents about the timing for restoration of
11 services also stands to be improved. While the
12 Housing Authority posted some flyers in the
13 developments about Hurricane Sandy, there were
14 none about a timeline for getting back vital
15 services like heat and hot water, and this caused
16 a lot of frustration and outrage from residents.
17 This is especially problematic for seniors and
18 others in vulnerable situations. People who
19 evacuated from NYCHA developments didn't know when
20 it was okay for them to come back.

21 Eventually, NYCHA posted a list on
22 its website detailing the status of different
23 developments' service restoration status, but it
24 was not accurate in all cases. Moreover,
25

1
2 Hurricane Sandy deprived many people of their
3 access to phone and internet services for a
4 considerable amount of time even after the power
5 was restored, making checking their website
6 difficult; not to mention that, even in the best
7 of times, many seniors and low income people don't
8 have consistent access to the internet to begin
9 with.

10 Lastly, however, I would like to
11 commend NYCHA for recognizing that putting a
12 moratorium on evictions for the months following
13 the hurricane was the right thing to do. I heard
14 some testimony saying that wasn't actually what
15 happened.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you
17 summarize please?

18 EMILEE ROSENBLATT: This is my last
19 thing.

20 Similarly, regarding the rent
21 abatement, even though timing and communication
22 could have been better, I commend NYCHA for at
23 least recognizing that it was the right thing to
24 do, especially because of the financial challenges
25 residents endured in losing food and purchasing

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

Some people are leaving, so I really want to try to get to this. The fourth panel, you know who you are. Nancy, Florence, please come on up. For the record, testimony has been submitted from the Legal Aid Society, from United Neighborhood Houses and from the Office of State Senator Brad Hoylman. That's all. And Assembly Member Gottfried, I didn't see that. Okay. It's a joint testimony?

1
2 There we go. A joint testimony, that's all being
3 submitted into the record. This is the fourth
4 panel. The fifth panel is the legal services
5 providers, whoever is still here. The sixth
6 panel, I hope you're still here, Paulie Anne,
7 Caroline Nagy, Carl Stubbs and Paul Schubert
8 [phonetic]. Okay, go ahead. Press the button.

9 NANCY ORTIZ: Good afternoon.

10 Thank you, Chair Mendez, Council Member Arroyo and
11 the panel for affording us resident leaders the
12 opportunity to testify on the dos and don'ts of
13 New York City Housing Authority. First of all, I
14 would like to give NYCHA a C rating, C for
15 consistency in their policies that they can never
16 follow.

17 Secondly, I represent Vladeck
18 Houses. It's a 1,773 family development, which 60
19 percent is senior. I as a resident leader ensured
20 that I obtained most of my handicapped, disabled,
21 wheelchair bearing, people who are on life
22 sustaining supports, dialysis, anyone who required
23 any type of medical attention, I have a complete
24 listing of them and we did go door knocking to
25 check on all of our residents.

1
2 In addition, the following morning
3 after Sandy, I went in my car and I obtained ice
4 from the Bronx to bring to persons who had
5 diabetic medication, which is required to be
6 refrigerated.

7 I got no assistance from Housing.
8 The staff at my development worked 24 hours. The
9 manager had to go and check on a life-sustaining
10 resident who was on life sustaining support, every
11 45 minutes. I never once saw Family Services. I
12 had to literally go beg, borrow, scream, holler to
13 get food and assistance for my development. I got
14 nothing.

15 Family Services did not show up to
16 Vladeck Houses until Saturday after the storm.
17 Police did not come to Vladeck Houses until Friday
18 morning, door knocking with a sheet, telling us
19 where the shelters were. We received no
20 assistance, nothing, zilch.

21 Member Mendez, you saw me in the
22 street one night. We were trying to get food. We
23 were treated indignantly and with disrespect and
24 discord by the staff from the Mayor's Office when
25 I attempted to go and get food by Smith Houses,

1
2 which was totally unacceptable. My residents
3 needed food. We had water. We had gas. We did
4 not have food. Many of my residents could not go
5 up and down the stairs.

6 In light of everything, I have a
7 listing of things that I feel NYCHA could utilize
8 in their next planning and emergency preparedness.
9 First of all, their support staff. All
10 developments that had full staffing, they should
11 have provided some of that staffing to support the
12 developments that required it. Many of the
13 developments were stuck with staff that had not
14 been able to go home 24 hours, without sleep,
15 without baths, which is unacceptable, especially
16 when you had staff sitting behind desks.

17 Secondly: CERT training. It's a
18 community emergency response team. Staff should
19 have CERT training in every development with a
20 hard copy training roster placed in the EPM book
21 where CERT is conducted by the Office of Emergency
22 Management, and this is free. Every development
23 should have a minimum of two staff members trained
24 in CPR and first aid, with a hard copy training
25 roster also placed in their EPM book.

1
2 To ensure that all equipment is
3 topped off with fuel, in addition to maintaining
4 several backup fuel containers. Water supplies
5 and cots, a hard copy listing of every development
6 should be on hand with the total number of
7 assigned staff and title within each sector.

8 Encourage resident leaders to
9 obtain CERT training and have them give volunteers
10 within their developments to obtain training as
11 well and assign trained persons as building
12 captains.

13 Keep lines of communication.
14 Obtain a method of maintaining communication
15 during outages. In today's technology, anything
16 is possible. Maintain an ample backup supply in C
17 Zone areas to assist in A and B areas when
18 affected. Conduct annual emergency preparedness
19 training and mock drills for all staff.

20 I could sit here and go on and on,
21 however I will attach all of my recommendations
22 with this testimony. I thank you once again for
23 affording me this opportunity and hope this
24 testimony is heard in Washington for the Sandy
25 relief funds. Not only for NYCHA, which is the

acronym of "No you can't have anything."

Residents and developments affected, which seem to continuously remain in the rear, but to every community impacted by hurricane Sandy. Thank you.

FLORENCE DENT-HUNTER: Good afternoon. My name is Florence Dent-Hunter and I'm the president of the tenant association at the Elliot and Chelsea Houses in Manhattan.

October was a difficult month for me. Not only because of the super storm Sandy but also because of the passing of my husband. While my family was going through this personal experience, the lights went out on October 29th at the Elliot and Chelsea Houses.

Fortunately, my children came and got me out of the area. I didn't want to leave, but having just buried my husband, they didn't want me to stay home alone. I was not at the development during the days after the storm, but kept myself abreast of everything that was happening in the development and in Chelsea by phone calls from and to other members of the association that were in their apartments.

Through them, I learned of the hard

1
2 work of the NYCHA workers, the community center
3 and other members of the community to support the
4 tenants in the development. As the president of
5 the association, it was hard for me not to be
6 helping other tenants. The development did not
7 have power for five days, and it was difficult for
8 many seniors, frail tenants to get out of their
9 apartments. NYCHA, Hudson Guild and other
10 organizations coordinated efforts to provide all
11 tenants with food, water, blankets and other
12 items. Although it was a difficult time for all,
13 the community was able to work together and
14 provide support and assistance to each other.

15 It is clear more needs to be done
16 to deal with situations like this. In the future,
17 better communication, and preparation for future
18 events is necessary. At the tenants association,
19 we started a process to inform tenants and keep a
20 log of tenants in need. I would like to thank
21 NYCHA for their efforts. We know there were
22 difficult times and working together we can move
23 forward. Thank you.

24 REGINALD BOWMAN: Good evening. My
25 name is Reginald Bowman. I'm the chairman of the

1
2 Citywide Council of Presidents of the New York
3 City Housing Authority that represents the over
4 600,000 families or people that live in the New
5 York City Public Housing communities.

6 I came to testify tonight about the
7 Sandy relief effort. I'd like to thank the
8 Chairwoman for conducting these hearings.

9 Hopefully, these oversight hearings for NYCHA and
10 other city agencies about this particular response
11 to this natural disaster will produce the adequate
12 response that needs to be done and the preparation
13 for this type of thing in the future.

14 Someone earlier this evening said
15 that poverty was a slow hurricane, and I think
16 that the New York City Housing Authority and its
17 residents have been suffering from the aftermath
18 of a decades long storm of political indifference
19 or a storm of hurricane proportions that have
20 under funded NYCHA prior to this super storm.

21 I believe that this experience
22 should wake up the powers that be to the fact that
23 the City of New York must invest in the
24 infrastructure of the New York City Housing
25 Authority and the waterfronts of this city,

1
2 because prior to this super storm, no one ever
3 expected that this type of devastating natural
4 catastrophe would actually hit New York with the
5 type of force that it did. This should be a
6 wakeup call to get prepared for these future
7 events.

8 Also, I would like to urge the City
9 Council to understand that in Washington as we
10 speak, the secretary of HUD has been assigned by
11 the president to be responsible for making sure
12 that Sandy relief is adequately distributed and
13 used in this region.

14 You also need to know that Mr.
15 Donovan has created a panel that is going to be
16 responsible for this allocation. As we speak, no
17 one, and I think I heard Mr. House say that NYCHA
18 is working on being a part of it. No one on that
19 panel is representing public housing and we should
20 have a voice on it, not only as NYCHA staff but
21 residents should have a voice in the decisions and
22 be connected to the way that this funding is going
23 to be allocated.

24 As the bill rolls out, we also need
25 to make sure that the Mayor's Office and the City

1
2 Council line items the New York City Housing
3 Authority into an connects us directly to that
4 funding. We need to make sure that we're on the
5 front of that list, along with the rest of this
6 region, to receive the adequate funding to recover
7 from this storm.

8 All this evening or today, I
9 listened to the presentations of everyone else, so
10 most of my testimony, which I handed to you, just
11 sort of repeats what has been said earlier this
12 evening.

13 One of the things I'd like point
14 and I'd like to read just two more things and then
15 I'm going to turn over the floor. This super
16 storm hit us with the most powerful winds and
17 storm surge ever encountered by the northeast
18 corridor. It crippled all of the communication,
19 power and transportation systems in the New York
20 City metropolitan area, bringing the City of New
21 York to a standstill. This not only brought us to
22 a standstill but it caused disorientation on
23 almost every level. Because when you shut down
24 communications and transportation in the City of
25 New York where everything is delivered here, and

1
2 the first responders' homes in the region were
3 actually hit with disasters, that meant that a lot
4 of the things that would normally happen in
5 response to this type of a disaster was shut down
6 within the first 48 hours.

7 There were thousands of unsung
8 heroes and sheroes that evolved out of this
9 process. I would like to publicly thank Occupy
10 Sandy, People's Relief, FUREE, GOLES, Legal Aid,
11 Legal Services, New York Cares, and the thousands
12 of people who actually responded when this natural
13 catastrophe took place.

14 I would also like to say that when
15 this storm was on the way, there was a plan in
16 place that included the NYCHA resident leadership
17 and we were on the phone almost five days before
18 the storm hit to talk about the plan that was in
19 place. Unfortunately, the plan that was in place
20 had a lot of holes in it, because no one ever
21 really expected this disaster to be as large as it
22 would be.

23 I attached a picture to my
24 testimony of the actual size of Hurricane Sandy.
25 A lot of people really still don't realize that

1
2 this storm was the largest storm that ever hit the
3 northeast coast and they're still trying to
4 actually wrap their minds around its effects.

5 I would like to commend the people
6 who did have a plan in place. It didn't work
7 perfectly. But I would like to point out that
8 there was an emergency plan for our coastal zone
9 properties and for making sure that we had direct
10 access to the Mayor's Offices and the management
11 plan system, which got to the National Guard and
12 FEMA and the elected officials to work together to
13 open up the floodgates of needed relief.

14 We were all recovering from a
15 traumatic experience when this happened. Not only
16 the first responders and the residents but the
17 people who were in place to provide the support
18 and the services. So it took us a few days to
19 shake off the effects of Sandy and then begin the
20 recovery process. Everybody in the region knows
21 what happens.

22 I'd also like to give special
23 recognition to the resident leaders of Brooklyn
24 South's Coney Island area in particular, Carolyn
25 Walton of Glenwood for creating--

[Pause]

REGINALD BOWMAN: --who just put up a table. Deborah Carter of Gravesend Houses that served more than three developments and is still out here. And to President Peggy Thomas of Hammels Houses in the Rockaway, all who were literally cut off by the storm, for surviving the days in the cold and the dark. And you heard the rest of the testimony of many of the other resident leaders. I called it the creation of Operation Resident Recovery Centers.

The residents stepped up to the plate when things were needed to be done. I also would like to publicly commend Rutgers, Smith, Vladeck Houses and their leaders, because there's one right here, and the leaders of Staten Island who were all impacted by this, because when the going got tough, they did raise and stand up and do what they were supposed to do in this time of the storm.

I'd also like to commend the City Council leaders.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you summarize?

REGINALD BOWMAN: I'm going to wrap up now.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

REGINALD BOWMAN: The City Council leaders for their standing up. I'm going to close with this. This was a storm that no one ever expected. The response to this was typical. Again, I think that the storm that the New York City Housing Authority residents and the agency has been going through prior to Sandy of being under funded needs to be also dealt with. We certainly need to make sure that we get the Sandy relief money that we're supposed to get from FEMA and be on that list. We certainly need to stand up this year and make sure that the Housing Authority is line itemed back into the state budgets and into the city budgets as an important infrastructure of this city. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. We're going to certainly find out about that committee. Nancy, thank you for coming and giving your testimony. Vladeck Houses is actually a Zone B building, but like you said, there are 60 percent seniors there. Besides the senior

1 building, these were things that I pointed out to
2 the Authority, and we were left to fend for
3 ourselves. Thank you. Anyone here from Legal Aid
4 Society, because we did get that in writing?
5 Legal Aid Society? Harvey, Ann Dibble and Julia
6 Russell? Grab the microphone and start giving
7 your testimony.
8

9 ANN DIBBLE: Chairman Mendez,
10 Council Members, and staff, good evening. Thank
11 you for giving me the opportunity to testify today
12 about NYCHA's response to Super Storm Sandy. My
13 name is Ann Dibble, and I'm the director of the
14 Storm Response Unit at the New York Legal
15 Assistance Group. My colleague Julia Russell was
16 here with me most of the afternoon, but just had
17 to leave. I want to also thank Sunny Noh, who is
18 another supervising attorney at NYLAG for helping
19 prepare these remarks.

20 NYLAG is a nonprofit law firm
21 dedicated to providing free legal services in
22 civil law matters to low-income New Yorkers.
23 NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the homebound
24 and disabled as well as others in need of free
25 legal services.

1
2 After Sandy devastated so much of
3 Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten
4 Island, NYLAG responded promptly, dedicating legal
5 staff, setting up a legal hotline and sending
6 lawyers directly to impacted neighborhoods through
7 partnerships with community-based organizations
8 and the use of our mobile legal help center.

9 For vulnerable New Yorkers and the
10 organizations that serve them, the storm brought
11 to the forefront the challenges faced daily by
12 those with limited resources, limited support and
13 language and mobility barriers.

14 For residents of NYCHA Public
15 Housing, the storm reinforced the familiar
16 experience of being deprived of the legal rights
17 to which they are entitled and of receiving worse
18 treatment than that accorded to many private
19 tenants. It is well known in this room that NYCHA
20 residents have had serious complaints about
21 NYCHA's management since long before the storm.

22 We know that over the last few
23 years, NYCHA has been falling further and further
24 behind in making repairs to remove unsafe and
25 hazardous conditions in residents' apartments, in

1
2 many cases scheduling repairs one to two years
3 out. While NYCHA excuses this delay by citing
4 funding problems, it has not been deterred from
5 seeking to evict residents in nonpayment and
6 chronic rent delinquency cases, despite tenants'
7 legal right to withhold rent for a landlord's
8 failure to make necessary repairs.

9 We would like to focus today on
10 NYCHA's response after the storm, both in their
11 failure to timely restore services and make
12 repairs; and failing to providing adequate
13 economic relief for the periods of time residents
14 were and in some instances still are without
15 essential services.

16 During the first three weeks after
17 the storm, NYCHA did not have a strong presence in
18 affected areas. Residents relied on community
19 organizations and volunteers to check on the
20 disabled and the elderly and provide food, warm
21 blankets, et cetera. Many clients have complained
22 to NYLAG that they felt abandoned by building
23 management and received little to no information
24 about the conditions of their building. What
25 little information they did receive was often

1
2 confusing and conflicting, including information
3 about whether or not they should evacuate their
4 building.

5 In later November, one Red Hook
6 tenant reported that she had not seen a NYCHA
7 employee since the days of the storm itself and
8 that NYCHA had made no effort to evacuate her
9 family or their neighbors. Another man reported
10 that NYCHA had made no effort to assist his
11 elderly, disabled mother in her Red Hook
12 development, forcing him to find placement for her
13 in a nursing home. We also met an elderly NYCHA
14 tenant from Brighton who was left in her
15 apartments with no contact from NYCHA, and we know
16 this was true of many of her neighbors as well,
17 living for weeks with no heat or hot water and no
18 way to fill prescriptions for medicine.

19 Many apartments sustained severe
20 water damage and many apartments are now dealing
21 with a growing mold nuisance. It was quite
22 surprising to hear Mr. House state that NYCHA
23 searched so many apartments and found no
24 significant evidence of mold. We know that before
25 the storm, mold was a serious issue for NYCHA

1
2 tenants and since the storm we've heard many, many
3 complaints from NYCHA residents and we know that
4 this is an issue that's going to continue to grow.

5 One NYCHA tenant in Red Hook has
6 told us that a NYCHA employee first came to his
7 apartment a full month after Sandy. By that time,
8 his kitchen was already developing mold due to
9 water that had backed up through his sink and also
10 broken through tiles in the kitchen floor. He
11 told us the garbage in the building had not been
12 picked up since before the storm and that the
13 hallways were unbearable because of the stench.
14 While it is estimated by NYCHA that all
15 developments have restored electricity, heat and
16 hot water, we know that many apartments are still
17 uninhabitable due to water damage and mold
18 conditions.

19 To make matters worse for suffering
20 NYCHA residents, during the first weeks after the
21 storm, NYCHA continued to serve court summons and
22 eviction notices on residents in developments that
23 were without heat, hot water and electricity.

24 On November 16, 2012, NYLAG's
25 Special Litigation Unit sent a demand letter to

1
2 NYCHA. Asking that NYCHA: immediately provide a
3 blanket one month rent abatement to affected
4 residents; institute a policy that no late
5 payments or failures to make payments would be
6 cited for future nonpayment or chronic rent
7 delinquency cases for any period that developments
8 are without essential services; and stay
9 commencement of any new and any pending eviction
10 proceedings until all essential services are
11 restored. NYCHA responded on November 23, 2012,
12 stating only that it would stay commencement of
13 new eviction proceedings for residents in
14 evacuation Zone A from November 15th until what
15 was originally January 1st and is now February 1,
16 2013, but failed to sufficiently address our other
17 concerns.

18 We have spoken to and met numerous
19 displaced NYCHA residents who have had to expend
20 their limited resources to pay for alternative
21 temporary housing because FEMA hotels were at
22 capacity, to pay for food and dry clothing and to
23 pay for transportation to their apartments to
24 check on the status of conditions and deter theft.
25 We've spoken to residents in Red Hook in November,

1
2 including an 81-year-old woman who was expecting
3 to default on her next rent bill because of the
4 costs she had to expend on temporarily evacuating
5 her water-damaged apartment.

6 We've spoken with a woman from Far
7 Rockaway who was unable to pay her November rent
8 because she was also forced to pay for her own
9 temporary housing due to the unavailability of
10 FEMA hotels. She also incurred costs traveling to
11 and from her apartment to monitor the conditions
12 of her building, which was necessary because she
13 could not get a clear answer from NYCHA about when
14 the building would be open again.

15 We spoke last week to a NYCHA
16 resident in Rockaway who finally received her rent
17 credit, which was a mere \$80, for her apartment
18 from which she is still displaced due to mold
19 conditions. This client has a 16-month-old child
20 who became severely ill when they tried to reenter
21 the apartment due to the unabated mold condition.

22 While we understand the tremendous
23 burden on NYCHA, especially in these unprecedented
24 circumstances, as a landlord NYCHA is not entitled
25 to rent payments when it fails to maintain its

1
2 properties in a habitable condition. NYCHA's
3 failure to promptly restore services, and to
4 repair water damaged and mold-ridden apartments,
5 perpetuates the idea that residents of public
6 housing are second-class citizens. However, NYCHA
7 is not exempt from the law; it is not exempt from
8 the housing maintenance code and the agency cannot
9 be absolved of its legal duties to its residents,
10 particularly when they constitute some of the most
11 vulnerable members of our city.

12 Thank you very much again for the
13 opportunity to testify and we welcome the
14 opportunity to further discuss our comments on
15 these matters.

16 HARVEY EPSTEIN: Good evening. My
17 name is Harvey Epstein. I'm the association
18 director at the Urban Justice Center. I want to
19 thank you, Chairman Mendez, for your leadership on
20 these issues, and thank you, Council Member Arroyo
21 for both sticking it out late into the evening for
22 this hearing.

23 As a resident of the Lower East
24 Side and a legal services lawyer, I really
25 appreciate you, Council Member Mendez, for all

1
2 your leadership on these issues, as it is my
3 community as well as where I live. I think you've
4 done an unbelievable job of raising these issues.
5 So thank you.

6 I don't want to repeat what other
7 people have said, but I think it's clear that
8 there's been a history of repair problems in
9 NYCHA. These repair problems have just been
10 exacerbated by what's happened in Sandy. We see
11 these issues of ongoing mold. These mold issues
12 have been subject to litigation that both our
13 organizations have been involved in for years if
14 not decades. NYCHA's acknowledgement that there's
15 a long history of repair problems does not absolve
16 the from the obligation.

17 Second of all, the issue around
18 Sandy really was about poor communication and
19 their failure to work with existing community-
20 based organizations around the city who are out in
21 these neighborhoods, out in these buildings, out
22 with all of us trying to figure out what to do and
23 trying to help people. NYCHA was not on the
24 ground. NYCHA was not there. NYCHA in some ways
25 stop and continues to stop community-based

1
2 organizations from the Rockaways into the Lower
3 East Side from doing what they need to do to help
4 vulnerable tenants. That's really still the
5 problem.

6 We were talking to organizations
7 the other day in the Rockaways who NYCHA is still
8 trying to remove the community-based organization
9 who is still trying to give out food and services
10 to the tenant in the Rockaways. And they're still
11 saying we don't think you should--if there's a
12 problem, you can't stay, you can't help. That's
13 the opposite message that NYCHA should be giving.
14 They should be thanking these organizations from
15 the Lower East Side, Good Old Lower East Side to
16 groups all over the city who have done a yeoman
17 job of ensuring that people who had serious needs
18 and that their needs are being met.

19 On the issue of how the money is
20 spent, that's really the conversation I think we
21 need to be having. There's money that's going to
22 be allocated, hopefully allocated to NYCHA,
23 hopefully for relief. The question is how that
24 money is going to be spent. I encourage the
25 Council to have serious oversight over where this

1
2 money goes, how the money is allocated to ensure
3 not only does it deal with the emergency problems
4 that people are facing but deals with a long-term
5 reality that we have here in New York City. That
6 this issue of the super storm and the hurricane,
7 it happened to be the worst ever in the history
8 but hopefully it'll be the worst ever, but the
9 reality if because of climate change it's going to
10 continue

11 We encourage what NYLAG suggested
12 about the abatement. It is insufficient. Tenants
13 that we have been talking to, it isn't enough.
14 The moratorium on evictions isn't long enough.
15 There are serious problems that continue to plague
16 tenants that we're talking to every day. Their
17 mold problem is unabated. Their conditions
18 continue to happen. The issues of spotty
19 electrical service, spotty elevator service
20 continues to happen every single day.

21 Thank you for all your work. The
22 Urban Justice Center is still here to help
23 continue with the legal services. We're doing
24 clinics all over the city. We'll continue to do
25 clinics all over the city with our legal services

1
2 partner. We hope that coordinated efforts along
3 with the Council to look towards--to assist low-
4 income working tenants to ensure that their lives
5 are stronger because of our work together. Thank
6 you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you so
8 much. I'm going to call the names again. There's
9 about ten people left. It should be two panels.
10 But if someone's not here, then we'll just get as
11 many people in on this panel. Paulie Anne, are
12 you here? Caroline Nagy, are you here? Come on
13 up. Carl Stubbs? Carl? Tiger Paul Schubert?
14 Carmen Rosario? Nathan Derby? Nathan? Joel
15 Kupferman? I know you're here, Joel. Prince
16 Brown? Joel, come on up to the panel. Prince
17 Brown? Okay. Yetta Kurlove? This will be the
18 last panel, it looks like. So as soon as you're
19 up there, just grab the microphone and you can
20 start giving your testimony.

21 CAROLINE NAGY: Good evening. My
22 name is Caroline Nagy and I'm the policy associate
23 for housing and homelessness at Citizens Committee
24 for Children of New York, or CCC. CCC is a 69-
25 year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy

1
2 organization dedicated to ensuring that every New
3 York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.
4 I would like to thank Chair Mendez as well as the
5 members of the Committee on Public Housing for
6 holding today's hearing on NYCHA's emergency
7 planning and response to Hurricane Sandy.

8 I will abbreviate my remarks
9 because much of what I have to say has already
10 been said and said well. Obviously, we want to
11 recognize the efforts of many New Yorkers,
12 including NYCHA employees and NYCHA leadership in
13 addressing the devastation caused by Hurricane
14 Sandy, along with many volunteer efforts.

15 I just wanted to address a
16 particular vulnerable group whose needs have not
17 been particularly addressed this afternoon and now
18 evening, and that is children. Children are a
19 special needs group who have particular needs that
20 must be taken into account in pre and post-storm
21 recovery.

22 It is unclear exactly how many
23 children remained in NYCHA public housing units
24 affected by Hurricane Sandy. However, on a whole,
25 minors under the age of 18 comprise 28 percent of

the total NYCHA public housing population.

With respect to the dangerous conditions resulting from Sandy immediately following the storm and the weeks following and continuing today, these are threats to the health and safety of all NYCHA residents, but especially including children.

In addition to measures taken to identify special needs, which they were defined earlier today as people who are dependent on life saving machinery and people with disabilities, we recommend that children also be taken into account. Children are very vulnerable during natural disasters due to their being much more susceptible to dehydration, malnutrition, exhaustion and other infectious diseases. Additionally, exposure to mold resulting from damp conditions is highly associated with the development of childhood asthma. Those are two particular ways in which children are disproportionately impacted by disasters such as this.

The on the ground coordination following a disaster in terms of meeting basic

1 needs, obviously, it's necessary to coordinate
2 with on the ground staff to ensure that children
3 are having their food, water, medicine, medical
4 care, sanitation and weather appropriate aid. In
5 addition, the preexisting mold and moisture
6 conditions, in addition to the conditions that
7 resulted from the hurricane need to be addressed
8 as quickly as possible, within a timely manner.
9 Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

10
11 JOEL KUPFERMAN: Thank you,
12 Chairperson. I think you two should look into
13 your contracts whether you should get time and a
14 half for being the ones that last the longest
15 that's here.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: We're just
17 doing our jobs.

18 JOEL KUPFERMAN: You got it.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And so are the
20 other ones, who are probably somewhere else doing
21 their jobs.

22 JOEL KUPFERMAN: I'm Joel Kupferman
23 from the New York Environmental Law and Justice
24 Project, the National Lawyers Guild, Hurricane
25 Sandy Task Force. I'm the counsel to Occupy Sandy

1 Legal. I'm the counsel to the Action Center. I'm
2 also the head of the Environmental Justice
3 Initiative for Haiti. I guess I wear many hats to
4 speak. I just also want to point out that I sat
5 at the same chair about 12 years ago, after 9/11.
6 That's when we brought evidence to City Council
7 that the air was not clean, despite the fact that
8 the city and EPA and others were telling us that
9 the air was clean.
10

11 I feel like I've been brought back
12 out of retirement, that this is déjà vu. That we
13 sat here for an hour and a half being told that
14 the mold is not bad. What also wasn't even
15 brought up is the exposure that people have had to
16 raw sewage.

17 New York City's sewage plants were
18 not fully operating. As a matter of fact, one in
19 the Rockaways was not operating at all for a long
20 time. A lot of that water that NYCHA admitted was
21 sitting on top of the equipment in the basements
22 or whatever, a lot of that is most probably raw
23 sewage, e.coli.

24 As head of the Environmental
25 Justice Initiative for Haiti, we're working on

1 cases now, suing the United Nations, just about
2 10, 12 of their members basically created raw
3 sewage, which created a cholera epidemic in Haiti.
4 So for NYCHA and the New York City Health
5 Department, I think it's important for you people
6 to ask all the other city departments, where is
7 the City Health Department in this? How come
8 they're not asking or giving out warnings to these
9 people? I think their policies just basically say
10 just say no to mold and sewage.
11

12 NYCHA has wrongly painted a picture
13 that there's no health crisis out there. You've
14 heard--

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
16 She was just informing me, but since you stopped.
17 Council Member, why don't you just say?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: This is the
19 second of several hearings that the Council is
20 having on Sandy related issues. The Health
21 Committee hearing, and I hope you'll be there to
22 bring up that same issue, is on the 24th. So if
23 you check the website and make--

24 JOEL KUPFERMAN: [interposing]
25 Sure.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I lost it.

That you're here, so that we can hear--

JOEL KUPFERMAN: [interposing]

Okay, but I think at this point, can I just say--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

[interposing] Because this is related to NYCHA and we want to keep the focus. So the Health Committee hearing is on the 24th.

JOEL KUPFERMAN: Got it. Okay. We hope that NYCHA is there, okay, because NYCHA as I understand it, didn't talk to the Health Department or CDC or others.

They also pointed out that they relied on a contractor to determine whether there was mold or not. They did the same thing--I mentioned before I'm counsel for the Action Center and other groups who were basically forced out or trying to be forced out that NYCHA didn't want them at their premises. The Action Center was told that they had to remove themselves in order for the place to be cleaned. We sat down with a lot of NYCHA executives and asked them what type of plan they had and they said that they hired a contractor to do the determination. You know

1
2 that's their--we sent an MPH, a master of public
3 health, and we found out that their cleanup plan
4 was bad. The disinfectant that they used, that's
5 what caused the illness in the center. Okay? So
6 I think it's really important for you to backup, I
7 mean to investigate who NYCHA is hiring, what
8 standards they're using and what type of
9 accountability they have on who they're hiring.

10 I also want to point out that after
11 speaking to many, many tenants, water damage is
12 not limited to the first floor. A lot of the
13 water came in on the upper floors and people were
14 inundated with flooding, you know, on those
15 floors. So for them to also say, and their claim
16 is that mold is just relegated to the first floor
17 is false.

18 I think the biggest sin that's
19 taken place here is that tenants, NYCHA tenants
20 forced to be living with wet clothing and wet
21 furniture. Okay? FEMA has given out hundreds of
22 thousands of dollars to people in houses, not just
23 in the boroughs but in Long Island and elsewhere,
24 to renovate their houses. As I understand it,
25 very, very few people have gotten money to remove

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

1
2 definitely we should look at the raw sewage. Also
3 a concern that the service providers that are
4 there, including Action Center, FUREE have had
5 problems of even remaining in their places. NYCHA
6 is using higher standards in terms of cleanliness
7 than they would put on any one of their own, any
8 other facilities to force these places out.

9 I'd also want to point out that
10 water testing has brought up heterotrophic
11 bacteria in some of the Ocean Bay housing. That
12 type of bacteria could be parasitic and we're
13 demanding--we're the ones that asked on behalf of
14 the tenants to have further water testing. NYCHA
15 does not want to know what's out there.

16 I'd also want to point out that
17 NYCHA could be doing a lot more that's there and
18 also they should be giving more tools to their own
19 tenants. I think that we should really--we'll
20 present more evidence in terms of the health
21 hazards that are out there.

22 Also, they mentioned before that
23 their direct connection is with HUD. I'll give
24 you copies of testimony that HUD has presented to
25 Congress about how bad mold is and that how HUD is

1
2 supposedly has put mold as one of their main
3 objectives, and yet now we're being told by NYCHA
4 that mold is not a problem. So thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Next?

6 TIGER PAUL SCHUBERT: The thing is
7 red. Do I press it for green?

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Excuse me?
9 It's being captured. Push it again, because you
10 were being captured.

11 TIGER PAUL SCHUBERT: Okay. Hi.
12 My name is Tiger Paul Schubert from the Rockaways.
13 I've known Rosie since she was first getting
14 elected about 12 years ago. Ms. Carmen Arroyo--

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
16 Eight.

17 TIGER PAUL SCHUBERT: I have
18 noticed, I watch many City Council hearings on
19 cable TV channel 24 Time Warner, that Ms. Arroyo
20 and Ms. Mendez stay for the complete hearings. I
21 do want to compliment you that you want to read
22 the report, you want to see it personally.

23 Now, mold, there's a 62-page manual
24 called Rehabbing Flooded Houses by HUD. In it, it
25 has an entire chapter on mold. Now, Article 15,

1
2 New York State Penal Code, I've actually brought
3 it up on my laptop, states that NYCHA and any
4 other landlord is fully culpable and responsible
5 for the dangerous condition called mold. A
6 failure to remove it is criminal negligence.
7 Article 15 clearly states they can be arrested. I
8 would start with Mr. House and work my way down.

9 Now I live in the Rockaways. I had
10 a mold infection. The American Red Cross failed
11 to treat it. I went to see a doctor in Elmhurst.
12 He gave me some antibiotics. Ten days later and I
13 was cured. We have to use the law as a tool of
14 justice. Now, Article 15 only has one year of
15 penalty, but I'll take what I can get. I want to
16 use it. I want to increase it. I want to make it
17 from a misdemeanor to a felony.

18 As far as NYCHA not being able to
19 prevent floods, there are water inflated property
20 dam, property protectors. It's a long, narrow
21 tube, a bladder that Governor Cuomo spoke about.
22 You inflate it with water. It's six to eight
23 feet. It can be as tall as eight feet. DEP uses
24 is already when there's flooded streets. They
25 surround it with these long sausages. I had that

on my laptop as well. They're called water inflated dams.

In 2005, we had studies on how to prevent damage to infrastructure. There are flood barriers made of aluminum, made by a company called Pres Ray, P-R-E-S Ray dot com, upstate New York, which makes the barriers since 1955. We had money in from 9/11 that NYCHA could have used, money that MTA could have used to construct these barriers, to purchase them, to have them laying in a warehouse ready to use.

This is gross criminal negligence on the part of the commissioners. It's gross criminal negligence on the part of the MTA and Housing to not use these measures. I found them very easily on the internet. I was looking for barriers against flooding.

If you can keep the water out of the basement, which could have been done at a relatively modest cost, that would have prevented hundreds of million, \$300 million of damages could have been prevented.

What do you tell those people who are breathing in diesel fumes? They could have

1
2 used natural gas generators, which would not have
3 created that condition. The fact that they
4 searched to Tennessee to find portable boilers, I
5 found it also, criminal negligence. People died
6 because of that. Thank you, Rosie.

7 YETTA KURLAND: Chair, Council
8 Member Arroyo, you are here and the final hours
9 last night as well. So thanks for being here
10 again. I don't live in NYCHA housing but I live
11 near NYCHA housing and I consider the residents of
12 the NYCHA housing in my area neighbors and
13 friends. I'll talk a little bit about my
14 experiences--

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [interposing]
16 Can you please identify yourself for the record?

17 YETTA KURLAND: Oh pardon me. Yes.
18 My name is Yetta Kurland [phonetic]. I live in
19 Chelsea in the lower west side of Manhattan. When
20 Hurricane Sandy hit, I started calling some of my
21 neighbors and obviously, we dealt with the power
22 outage throughout the community. But within a few
23 days, power was restored in most of the area but
24 the NYCHA housing area was still without power or
25 water.

1
2 I remember it didn't really hit me
3 until I was driving in the area and I saw a group
4 of people around a fire hydrant that they had
5 unscrewed to get water out, to get for their daily
6 living. And it hit be how serious the problem was
7 and that there was really a severe problem in the
8 NYCHA housing complexes.

9 So we started to organize. We did
10 some canned food drives. It was really
11 incredible, frankly, to see the turnout of the
12 rest of the community come together for the folks
13 in NYCHA as well as another West Beth housing also
14 had some problems as well with long-term power
15 outages.

16 I really think that the issue here
17 is less about a blame shifting of who's
18 responsible but what I saw in the community from
19 an on the ground community response was an intense
20 sense of taking responsibility as a community. I
21 think that this city is hugely tasked with new
22 challenges. I think that Hurricane Sandy wakes us
23 up to the reality that the city is hugely tasked
24 with serious challenges around climate change. I
25 think that we have to accept the fact that there

1
2 is going to be an immense learning curve for us in
3 the years to come.

4 I hope that we can really be
5 vigilant in terms of learning from some of the
6 problems that we saw to increase response time. I
7 heard someone talk about having a buddy system. I
8 think that having volunteer opportunities so that
9 folks can help on a hyper local level, it was very
10 helpful for us in the community to be able to get
11 real time information about neighbors in the area
12 to know if somebody had medical concerns or
13 dietary restrictions.

14 I also think that there's like a
15 balance that in some ways is contradictory. But
16 on the one hand, I think that there's an intense
17 sense of urgency. Even one person being without
18 food, even one person losing their life or having
19 the severe hardships that we heard about is too
20 many. But at the same time, I think that what the
21 challenge is, is for us to learn on a systematic
22 level how to deal with climate change.

23 I think that the only other point
24 that I would like to make is that there was a
25 palpable difference between what was happening in

1
2 the NYCHA housing and what was happening in the
3 rest of the community. I think we all noticed
4 that. Luckily, our power came back within I think
5 it was five days. NYCHA's power was out much
6 longer.

7 Now, I'm sure that there were good
8 reasons for that, but we really have to be careful
9 as we talk about how we're responding to Hurricane
10 Sandy, how we're responding in terms of emergency
11 preparedness and how we prepare for the future
12 that we pay careful attention to distribution of
13 wealth. And that we're thoughtful about the way
14 that everybody is getting the type of information
15 about mold, the type of treatment and care for the
16 wetness and the losses and the access to
17 resources. Whether that be FEMA monies or
18 whatnot, that we really be thoughtful that the
19 type of work that we're about to undertake, which
20 will be massive, it will range from land use
21 changes, it will impact obviously funding from a
22 national level to a city level. It will impact if
23 people get to continue to live in the residence
24 that they have been living in.

25 I think we have to be really hyper

1
2 vigilant on being sure that in doing that we make
3 sure that this is a recovery vision that includes
4 all New Yorkers, not just NYCHA and not just in my
5 neck of the woods but throughout New York City.
6 So thank you again for your time.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very
8 much for your testimony and for staying until the
9 end and to my colleague Maria del Carmen Arroyo,
10 from the best borough in the city, because you
11 stayed here until the end.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [off mic]

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Well that and
14 I love the Yankees. No, for several reasons, that
15 and I love the Yankees.

16 I'm going to just say a couple of
17 things. One is I've been talking extensively to
18 NYCHA and certainly part of the problem is that,
19 you know, their basements are one story down and
20 sometimes 50, 60 feet down and all of that was
21 full of water, where all their electrical wirings
22 are at. They are certainly having conversations
23 about moving that higher up, possibly having to
24 take an apartment or something and put that wiring
25 there so that they don't have this problem again.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20
21
22
23
24
25

1
2 sufficient. In the buildings that weren't damaged
3 the last time, that was never done. So those are
4 some of the issues they're encountering which
5 impact on our residents at the end of the day.

6 We have a lot of work to do. At
7 the end of the day, I think it's all about
8 organizing, because I think we have shown as New
9 Yorkers that we are resilient and that we are
10 people who like to help other people. I saw it
11 during 9/11. I saw it during the blackout and
12 during the blizzard, I certainly saw it this past
13 hurricane.

14 We needed things and that's what we
15 were waiting for. We were waiting for food and we
16 were waiting for the buckets. Some of the people
17 brought that. We were waiting for an idea of when
18 this was going to get here. I think that's what
19 really affected people. They got desperate. They
20 didn't know when we were really going to get
21 electricity and get the help that we needed.

22 I just want to give a couple of
23 shout outs. We had some doctors come and
24 volunteer and we sent them out into those special
25 needs buildings where we had people in wheelchairs

1
2 and we had 10 to 20 people who were on dialysis
3 being brought down from those buildings and taken
4 into hospitals by our first responders. So we
5 certainly saved lives but a lot of people suffered
6 in between.

7 I want to, before I forget, because
8 I just saw this. I left it here. There was
9 testimony submitted into the record also by
10 University Settlement. I want to give a couple of
11 thank yous, also to my staff. My attorney, Ed
12 Atkin, thank you for being here, and Amy Stokes,
13 and for all your hard work in preparing for this
14 meeting.

15 For the people who provided me with
16 photos for today's little PowerPoint. Amy, thank
17 you. She did some of that. Tom Cramer
18 [phonetic], Kelly McGhee [phonetic], Shell Sheddie
19 [phonetic] and I can't remember the first name,
20 Morales, from NYCHA also gave me some pictures,
21 and Iris Cortez for putting the PowerPoint
22 together for me.

23 Thank you to all. This meeting
24 will be recessed and we will be reconvened at a
25 later date, where we will go over the NYCHA plan

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

that was finally released to us by the Mayor's Office. So stay tuned and come back for that because it's going to be fun.

JOEL KUPFERMAN: I just want to add one quick point.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Sure.

JOEL KUPFERMAN: I think their main defense is they didn't know what was coming. CIDNY, the Center for Disabled in New York has brought a lawsuit against NYCHA for what happened after Irene. They took people out in wheelchairs to temporary shelters and the temporary shelters could not allow the wheelchairs to fit and those people were basically left in limbo. So I think it's really important to point out and the committee to realize that NYCHA has been apprised in court and elsewhere of all these problems. For them to say that they don't know is a falsehood.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I'd like to get more information about those individuals. That's the first time I'm hearing about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: What? Yes. I was going to say something else and I can't

1

2 remember. We'll get to it when we reconvene this
3 hearing. Again, thank you everyone for being
4 here.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: 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 February 15, 2013