

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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February 7, 2013  
Start: 10:07 a.m.  
Recess: 12:47 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room  
250 Broadway, 14th Floor

B E F O R E:  
DOMENIC M. RECCHIA, JR.  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.  
Leroy G. Comrie, Jr.  
Lewis A. Fidler  
Helen D. Foster  
Robert Jackson  
G. Oliver Koppell  
Darlene Mealy  
Diana Reyna  
Albert Vann  
Fernando Cabrera  
Julissa Ferreras  
Karen Koslowitz  
James G. Van Bramer  
Peter F. Vallone, Jr.  
David G. Greenfield

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Joseph Rosenberg  
Executive Director  
Catholic Community Relations Council

Jeff Leb  
New York Director  
Orthodox Union

David Pollock  
Associate Executive Director  
Jewish Community Relations Council

Adina Frydman  
Executive Director of Synergy Department  
UJA Federation of New York

Dr. Paul de Vries  
President  
New York Divinity School

Rev. Cheryl Anthony  
Founder/Chief Operating Officer  
Judah International Christian Center

Rev. Christopher Dito  
International Christian Center

Rev. Alonzo Jordan  
Political Action Chair  
National Action Network

Steven Frohlich  
President  
Young Israel of Brighton Beach

Pastor Agustin Quiles  
Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ

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

Pastor Connis Mobley  
United Community Baptist Church

Rabbi Yehoshua Merenfeld  
Rabbi in Congregation  
Yeshiva Tiferes Menachem

Rev. Savone James  
Coney Island Gospel Assembly Church

Rev. Edwin Malave  
New Church International

Rubin Margules  
President  
Manhattan Beach Jewish Center

Chaim Leibtag  
President of Congregation  
Knesoth Israel

Rev. Duane Sleet  
First Baptist

Rev. Evan Gray  
Macedonia Baptist Church

Rev. William Barm  
St. Barnabas Lutheran Church

Adam LeBron  
Reaching Out Ministries

Magdalena LeBron  
Reaching Out Ministries

Rev. William Devlin  
Co-chair  
NYC Right to Worship

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Good morning,  
3 ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to City Hall, to  
4 the Finance Committee hearing. My name is Domenic  
5 Recchia. I'm the chair of this wonderful  
6 committee.

7 Today, we're holding a hearing on  
8 Resolution 165, sponsored by Council Member  
9 Vallone, myself, Speaker Quinn. It calls upon the  
10 United States Congress to introduce and pass  
11 legislation that would amend the Robert T.  
12 Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance  
13 Act to allow aid to be given to houses of worship  
14 affected by Superstorm Sandy.

15 If anyone would like to testify  
16 today, because we'd love to hear from everyone to  
17 hear what the issues are, you must fill out a  
18 form. The sergeant-at-arms, you must fill out a  
19 form and hand it in. We'll call them up to  
20 testify.

21 Before we move forward, I'd like to  
22 recognize all of my colleagues who have joined us  
23 here today. To my left, we have Robert Jackson.  
24 To my right, we have Council Member Vallone,  
25 Council Member Helen Diane Foster, Council Member

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2 Lewis Fidler. This is my attorney, Tanisha  
3 Edwards. And we have Kiana Brea [phonetic].  
4 Kiana, stand up. She did a great job, all right,  
5 in helping us organize this.

6 [Applause]

7 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We also have  
8 Kenny Graves [phonetic] from my staff. I want to  
9 thank my whole staff and move forward.

10 The Stafford Act, the federal  
11 government, through FEMA reimburse states and  
12 municipalities for funding assistance provided to  
13 affected individuals and eligible local  
14 governments and certain private not-for-profit  
15 organizations in recovery from a major disaster.  
16 Under the act, the federal government, through the  
17 United States Office of Homeland Security and FEMA  
18 reimburse states and municipalities for funding  
19 used as a major disaster.

20 FEMA's mission is to support the  
21 citizens and first responders to promote that as a  
22 nation we work together to build, sustain and  
23 improve our capability to prepare for, protect  
24 against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all  
25 hazards. One of the ways in which FEMA helps the

1  
2 nation to rebuild is by providing aid to states  
3 impacted by natural disasters.

4           On October 30, 2012, in the wake of  
5 Superstorm Sandy, FEMA announced that federal  
6 disaster assistance was made available to New York  
7 State, and ordered federal assistance to  
8 supplement state and local recovery efforts in the  
9 areas affected by Superstorm Sandy, beginning on  
10 October 27, 2012. Through this action,  
11 homeowners, businesses, small business owners,  
12 some not-for-profits affected by the storm became  
13 eligible to apply for federal disaster assistance.

14           However, if applicable FEMA's  
15 financial assistance policies are left unchanged,  
16 houses of worship will not receive assistance for  
17 the rebuilding of their damaged or destroyed  
18 properties. While the Stafford Act does not  
19 explicitly include or exclude houses of worship  
20 from eligibility for public assistance, in its  
21 regulations and policies, FEMA has imposed  
22 restrictions on eligibility for aid to houses of  
23 worship. FEMA excludes facilities whose primary  
24 use is religious from eligibility and FEMA has  
25 reportedly denied applications for financial

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2 assistance submitted by houses of worship affected  
3 by Superstorm Sandy.

4 Many of these houses of worship  
5 provide the services outlined in FEMA's  
6 eligibility requirements. These services include  
7 low-income housing, alcohol and drug rehab  
8 programs, programs for battered spouses,  
9 transportation programs, and all kind of food  
10 programs and medical programs or medical  
11 facilities.

12 Amending the act to expressly allow  
13 houses of worship to receive FEMA assistance would  
14 ensure that houses of worship are able to rebuild  
15 and repair facilities. Houses of worship are  
16 staples in our community that deliver the health  
17 and safety services outlined in FEMA's public  
18 assistance program are able to rebuild and repair  
19 the facility where those essential services are  
20 provided.

21 Today, we will hear from many  
22 houses of worship who provide essential services  
23 and who have been severely impacted by Superstorm  
24 Sandy. Representatives from the New York Civil  
25 Liberties Union have also been invited to testify.

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2                   Before I move forward, I would just  
3 like to give my colleague, who is a sponsor of  
4 this resolution. I want to thank Congresswoman  
5 Grace Meng and all the New York delegation, the  
6 congressional delegation, Jerrold Nadler, Joe  
7 Crowley, Hakeem Jeffries, Yvette Clarke, Nydia  
8 Velazquez, Congressman Serrano and all of them,  
9 everybody has just been fabulous in trying to help  
10 us out. They really want to get this. We're  
11 trying to create some attention on this in that we  
12 really need this help and the houses of worship  
13 should be helped. They should be addressed. If  
14 we call on them when there's a disaster, then we  
15 should help them in the recovery part.

16                   At this time, I recognize the  
17 Council Member from Queens, Peter Vallone, to make  
18 an opening statement.

19                   COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you,  
20 Mr. Chair. In addition to Congress Member Meng  
21 and the others you thanked, I'd like to thank you  
22 and the Speaker for moving this so quickly. It  
23 was just introduced yesterday. Time is of the  
24 essence here. I also want to thank Council Member  
25 Fernando Cabrera for his behind the scenes help.



1  
2 Many of us in the City Council were  
3 trying to get aid down to the affected areas right  
4 after Sandy occurred, Tuesday, Wednesday,  
5 Thursday, Friday. There was no government down  
6 there, despite what they say. There was no FEMA.  
7 There was no OEM. There was no Red Cross. There  
8 was nobody.

9 The only way I was able, and other  
10 Council Members were able to get assistance to the  
11 people who needed it were through the houses of  
12 worship. Not just for the first week, even after  
13 that people were calling me up, "Who do I give  
14 this to?" There was nobody to call and say who to  
15 donate to. We just sent it down to the Church of  
16 St. Francis de Sales and others. We were just  
17 sending it to them. They were essential. They  
18 were critical.

19 In fact, that's what the  
20 regulations say. Under FEMA right now, nonprofits  
21 that provide critical and essential services are  
22 eligible. So I'm dumbfounded as to how FEMA has  
23 denied houses of worship aid right now. But if  
24 they need a law change for some apparent reason,  
25 let's to it. Let's support Congress Member Meng's

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bill.

The houses of worship were there when we needed them, when the people devastated by Sandy needed them, and they need us now. It would be a serious dereliction of our duties to not help them. They continue to help people to this day. They continue to be my best source of advice on who needs help and how to get help down there. I'm going to work as hard as I can on this. If there's anything else I can do or we can do, please contact my office because I stand ready to assist you.

Again, Mr. Chair, thank you very much for having this hearing so quickly and allowing me an opening statement. Thank you.

[Phone ringing]

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: It's Mayor Mike calling Tanisha. I'd like to recognize the Council Member from the Bronx, who's been a leader in the City Council for many, many years, and she's been a great help to me in helping, you know, in dealing with churches and houses of worship and helping them. She brought this to our attention also that we must help those houses of

1  
2 worship. I'd like to recognize Helen Diane  
3 Foster.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Thank you.  
5 I'll be brief. I want to thank Council Member  
6 Vallone for introducing this, of course, Council  
7 Member Recchia and the Speaker for moving so  
8 quickly. As a daughter of a minister, I  
9 understand firsthand the role that ministers and  
10 the church play, especially in the black church.  
11 Historically, when government and this country did  
12 acknowledge that blacks were in need of help, the  
13 black church was it. So it is really the first  
14 line of contact in communities.

15 I was not aware until Council  
16 Member Recchia brought it to my attention that  
17 FEMA didn't provide aid, which to me is ridiculous  
18 because especially--across the board, houses of  
19 worship, but especially in communities of color,  
20 we are everything from after school programs to  
21 shelters to feeding souls as well as feeding them  
22 physically. So I applaud us for doing this in  
23 such a fast tone.

24 Again, thank you, Council Member  
25 Vallone for making sure that we do this. Whatever

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2 I can do as chair of State and Federal Legislation  
3 to also make sure we move it down in Washington, I  
4 will do. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you.  
6 We've been joined by Council Member Julissa  
7 Ferreras. We've been joined by Council Member  
8 Karen Koslowitz. We've been joined by Council  
9 Member Oliver Koppell.

10 Before we hear from the public, I  
11 want all my colleagues to know that tomorrow we  
12 have another hearing. That hearing will be joint  
13 with Education, with the chair sitting to my left,  
14 Robert Jackson. We'll hold an oversight hearing  
15 on the cost of pupil transportation in New York  
16 City. The hearing will be held in this building  
17 on the 16th Floor and will begin at 10:30. I  
18 encourage all my colleagues to attend.

19 In addition, every Council Member  
20 has in front of them a packet which contains the  
21 committee report and a copy of the reso,  
22 Congresswoman Meng's amendment, a copy of the  
23 Stafford Act, the FEMA regulations and a  
24 Department of Justice memo.

25 At this time, I ask Tanisha Edwards

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to call the first panel.

TANISHA EDWARDS: Joe Rosenberg,  
Jeff Leb, David Pollock [phonetic], and Adina  
Frydman.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Good morning.  
Just state your name for the record then you can  
make your statement.

JOSEPH ROSENBERG: Good morning,  
Chairman Recchia and members of the New York City  
Council Finance Committee. I'm Joseph Rosenberg,  
Executive Director of the Catholic Community  
Relations Council, representing the Archdiocese  
and the Diocese of Brooklyn on local legislative,  
regulatory and policy matters.

I'm pleased to be before you today  
to testify on this very important resolution and  
pleased to share the table with colleagues who  
also feel strongly about this.

A colleague of mine from the  
Diocese intended to testify, but due to a family  
emergency, he could not attend. So I'm going to  
incorporate a paragraph or two of his statement  
into my testimony.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Do you have a  
3 copy of that for the members?

4 JOSEPH ROSENBERG: Yes, it's being  
5 distributed right now, both my testimony and my  
6 colleague's.

7 The archdiocese and the diocese  
8 strongly support Reso 4379, urging FEMA to provide  
9 disaster relief for houses of worship damaged by  
10 Hurricane Sandy. We agree with Speaker Quinn's  
11 letter, dated January 4, 2013 to W. Craig Fugate,  
12 the administration for FEMA that, quote,  
13 "Churches, synagogues and mosques serve as the  
14 bedrock for our citizens and our communities," end  
15 quote, that FEMA aid should be able to be utilized  
16 to rebuild these damaged houses of worship.

17 When Hurricane Sandy hit the New  
18 York City area, pastors, priests, rabbis and their  
19 congregations, longstanding sources of spiritual  
20 support and comfort to communities, did not ask  
21 first if their facilities would be eligible for  
22 federal assistance before providing food, shelter  
23 and relief to thousands of displaced and desperate  
24 residents of our city's shorefront neighborhoods.  
25 These institutions were instead among the first

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2 responders and are still in the forefront of all  
3 recovery efforts.

4                   Now these sources of strength and  
5 compassion that weathered flood and fires last  
6 October and November are facing tremendous  
7 financial challenges in rebuilding their  
8 sanctuaries. To whom shall they turn if not the  
9 government that accepts their aid and ensures  
10 their right to provide physical and spiritual  
11 sustenance to those in need?

12                   Fifty-four churches in the  
13 Archdiocese of New York were damaged by Hurricane  
14 Sandy. In Staten Island, 23 churches sustained  
15 over \$2.2 million in damages. In Manhattan, 14  
16 churches were hit with \$1.8 million in damages.  
17 In the Bronx, \$627,000 in damages was incurred in  
18 17 churches. In the Diocese of Brooklyn and  
19 Queens, 71 churches were damaged, with 32 of them  
20 located in Brooklyn and 39 in Queens. The cost to  
21 rebuild the Brooklyn churches is \$1.7 million and  
22 the Queens churches, \$2 million. These numbers  
23 for all five boroughs will continue to grow as  
24 repairs are ongoing and invoices for work are  
25 submitted.

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2 FEMA guidelines indicate that  
3 facilities eligible for assistance include  
4 utilities, education, irrigation, medical  
5 emergency as well as those that provide essential  
6 governmental services. Governmental services is  
7 defined by FEMA as including museums, zoos,  
8 libraries, and community centers. All of these  
9 are certainly facilities that feed the soul and  
10 social needs of New Yorkers, yet houses of worship  
11 are not include in this category. Certainly, all  
12 of the FEMA listed institutions are essential to  
13 the fabric of our city, but it is a frightful  
14 omission to preclude houses of worship eligibility  
15 for such vital assistance, especially when other  
16 nonprofits are in fact eligible for such financial  
17 help.

18 It is important to state that  
19 religious organizations in this situation do not  
20 seek preferential treatment, simply to be treated  
21 fairly as any other institution serving the public  
22 good of stabilizing and rebuilding our  
23 communities. This approach needs to be embraced  
24 and this resolution voices this priority very  
25 strongly.



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2                   It must be noted that our request  
3 for financial assistance is in addition to and not  
4 to be at the expense of other federal monies that  
5 have been allocated to assist New York City's  
6 recovery from Hurricane Sandy. To benefit one  
7 group involved in the recovery of Sandy at the  
8 expense of another is not supported and should  
9 certainly not be contemplated by anyone.

10                   Among the most affected parishes  
11 without much media attention is the Visitation of  
12 the Blessed Virgin Mary in Red Hook. The basement  
13 of the Visitation Church has been the primary  
14 storage area for donations distributed to the  
15 community each Saturday, both before and after  
16 Hurricane Sandy. Simply because the storage area  
17 is the basement of a house of worship, it is  
18 currently ineligible to receive any public  
19 assistance.

20                   This is official federal policy,  
21 even though the food, clothing and other donated  
22 goods distributed from there go to anyone in the  
23 community who is in need, catholic or otherwise.  
24 If this happened to be the basement of a community  
25 center, there would be no question of its

1  
2 eligibility. Here, the Visitation is providing a  
3 valuable public service that the government would  
4 have to provide if not for the church.

5           Since the storm, the workspace for  
6 these community distribution events has had to  
7 move out of the destroyed public basement area of  
8 the rectory and into the private living quarters  
9 upstairs. It is also current FEMA policy not to  
10 offer assistance to rectories and convents except  
11 as mixed use facilities and only if they pass a  
12 poorly defined usage test. Residential properties  
13 not owned by a public not-for-profit are not  
14 subject to a test and therefore they are eligible.

15           This is exactly why this resolution  
16 is so important. It supports the viability of  
17 religious institutions to continue serving their  
18 communities by urging FEMA to provide assistance  
19 to damaged houses of worship. Thank you.

20           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you, M  
21 Rosenberg. We're going to hear from the whole  
22 panel, and then I'll give my colleagues an  
23 opportunity to ask questions. If you have  
24 testimony, you really don't have to read it. You  
25 could summarize and highlight the most important

1  
2 parts of it, because we have a lot of people that  
3 want to testify today. So I'm trying to give  
4 everybody an opportunity. I really don't want to  
5 go to a clock because I know everybody has to  
6 express, you know, some serious issues. Go ahead.

7           DAVID POLLOCK: Thank you, Mr.  
8 Chairman. I want to thank you, the members of the  
9 committee who are all friends. And I don't have  
10 to go into specifics about the issues here.  
11 Council Member Foster, your father was a mentor of  
12 mine. I also want to thank Congressman Chris  
13 Smith of New Jersey and Grace Meng and their  
14 staffs for their leadership and also Nathan  
15 Diament of the Orthodox Union, and Avi Schiff  
16 [phonetic], who many of you know, who've really  
17 pushed this issue forward.

18           I want to point out that current  
19 Supreme Court jurisprudence makes it clear that  
20 religious institutions may receive government  
21 financial aid in the context of a broad program  
22 administered on the basis of religion neutral  
23 criteria. I read that because it's a Supreme  
24 Court decision. I want to note that the Stafford  
25 Act predates the Supreme Court decision. So the

1  
2 lack of clarity in the Stafford Act would reflect  
3 a lack of clarity in what the case law was. The  
4 case law is now crystal clear.

5 Most houses of worship need FEMA's  
6 help to rebuild. They couldn't always get  
7 insurance. Many houses of worship don't operate  
8 at a profit, by definition. They are living from  
9 hand to mouth or plate to mouth. They don't  
10 usually receive grants but they continue to do the  
11 good work.

12 I know the synagogues. I know of  
13 synagogues that had no insurance, or no flood  
14 insurance. I know of synagogues that have  
15 millions of dollars of damage and their insurance  
16 company--they had flood insurance and their  
17 insurance company said your coverage is \$50,000.  
18 I know of one synagogue that had a million dollars  
19 of flood insurance and it will be inadequate.

20 As of February 1st, 86 houses of  
21 worship had individually registered with FEMA and  
22 requested what's called public assistance. My  
23 colleague Joseph Rosenberg noted that 125 houses  
24 of worship, Catholic houses of worship are  
25 subsumed in their two applications for public

1  
2 assistance. My ongoing concern is who's missing.  
3 Every day I hear of churches and synagogues that  
4 have heard, oh, you can't get anything from the  
5 government, so they haven't even put in an  
6 application.

7 Under the proposed legislation,  
8 houses of worship will get the same sort of  
9 reimbursements as other quote/unquote "essential"  
10 nonprofits. We think that that's right. This  
11 would allow houses of worship to be eligible for  
12 the same sort of benefit. So, for example, when  
13 the New York Aquarium has put in for an SBA loan  
14 and they've been denied an SBA loan because their  
15 damages are measured in the hundreds of millions  
16 and SBA will give two. They can go back to FEMA.  
17 We want houses of worship to be able to go back to  
18 FEMA and get more than the minimum, which is  
19 currently debris removal and emergency protective  
20 work.

21 Now, one of the things that I want  
22 to remind the committee is that there are Sandy  
23 relief funds that are currently within the control  
24 of New York State and New York City. They're  
25 called the CDBG funds. There are already

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2       incredibly important, important uses that the  
3       governor and the mayor have identified for these  
4       monies. We think that houses of worship should go  
5       and be considered in the same category.

6                       We think that houses of worship and  
7       frankly, other essential nonprofits should get  
8       what's essentially the same as the city's rapid  
9       repair program gives to homeowners. They provide  
10      homeowners with, quote, "permanent or temporary  
11      restoration of heat, power, hot water and other  
12      limited repairs to protect the home from further  
13      significant damage." Well, we believe that a  
14      community's spiritual home deserves no less  
15      protection.

16                      We thank you for your attention and  
17      your support.

18                      CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
19      very much. Next. Turn your microphone on please.  
20      State your name for the record and where you're  
21      from.

22                      COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: It's on  
23      the back. Right on the back, where your hand was  
24      before.

25                      ADINA FRYDMAN: Good morning,

1  
2 Council Finance Chair Recchia Jr., and members of  
3 the Council Finance Committee, my name is Adina  
4 Frydman and I'm Executive Director of the Synergy  
5 Department at UJA Federation of New York, a  
6 program that collaborates with and strengthens the  
7 work of synagogues across New York City and the  
8 surrounding counties.

9 Houses of worship of all faiths are  
10 a crucial part of the city's fabric. And while  
11 they have always been beacons of support, comfort  
12 and community resources, since Hurricane Sandy,  
13 New Yorkers have needed these institutions more  
14 than ever. These institutions are an essential  
15 part of neighborhoods and enable rights of  
16 passage, community gatherings, charitable  
17 activities and are sources of comfort and prayer.

18 In the face of lost homes and  
19 distressed property, disruption of employment  
20 opportunities and dislocated families, houses of  
21 worship have helped many find stability and  
22 fulfillment in an uncertain time. In the  
23 aftermath of Sandy, as with so many other natural  
24 disasters, churches, synagogues and other houses  
25 of worship have been places offering essential

1  
2 resources, response services to people in need,  
3 even while the church, mosque or synagogue itself  
4 is damaged.

5                   Toward that end, UJA Federation of  
6 New York is proud to have funded close to a  
7 million dollars to 76 synagogues to help these  
8 institutions support their communities through  
9 respite and relief and enlisted dozens of  
10 volunteers to rebuild damaged buildings. Our  
11 efforts have made a significant impact at  
12 synagogues including West End Temple in Belle  
13 Harbor, Queens; Congregation Kahal Yereim in  
14 Seagate, Brooklyn; and the Jewish Russian Learning  
15 Center in Staten Island and countless others.

16                   These houses of worship have helped  
17 the Jewish and broader communities in the  
18 neighborhoods they are serving. For example, each  
19 of these synagogues serves as vital hubs of  
20 community, providing physical, spiritual and  
21 emotional shelter for community members. During  
22 the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, many  
23 of the synagogues opened their doors to the  
24 boarder community, offering a warm meal,  
25 electricity, temporary childcare and opportunities



1  
2 to volunteer in the crucial relief and recovery  
3 efforts.

4           Without this vital support, many  
5 storm-affected residents would have been forced to  
6 relocate in order to participate in daily or  
7 weekly religious rituals essential to their lives.  
8 Assisting in this effort helps stabilize  
9 communities and help minimize psychological and  
10 emotional damage suffered from Hurricane Sandy.

11           Many houses of worship function  
12 similar to other nonprofits by providing daycare  
13 programming, schooling for children and youth,  
14 senior centers and resources for immigrants.  
15 These services are the lifeblood for communities  
16 and many receive both city tax levy and  
17 councilmanic funding for their work. Houses of  
18 worship have worked closely with elected officials  
19 and government on city, state and federal levels  
20 to coordinate disaster relief efforts to the  
21 benefit of the entire city.

22           It is therefore entirely  
23 appropriate for FEMA's aid program for private  
24 nonprofits to assist houses of worship with their  
25 rebuilding needs. Thank you for allowing me to

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testify on this important issue.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you very much.

JEFF LEB: Good morning, Chairman Recchia, Councilman Vallone, Vann, Fidler, Van Bramer, Jackson, Koslowitz, Koppell, Ferreras, Foster and counselor Edwards. Thank you so much for convening this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You did my job. I don't have to introduce everybody else that's here. Go ahead. What do you have to say?

JEFF LEB: Thank you. I'll read but I'll make it quick. My name is Jeb Leb and I'm the New York Director of the Orthodox Union. The Orthodox Union, or the OU, is the largest organization representing Orthodox Jewry around the world, representing over 300,000 people worldwide and thousands of synagogues, with over 200 in New York.

As we know and experienced firsthand, Superstorm Sandy caused widespread devastation throughout New York State and New York City. The New York State Council of Churches reported that over 100 of its member churches

1  
2 sustained damage. Dozens of synagogues in New  
3 York City sustained damage, while some were  
4 completely destroyed, including synagogues in Bays  
5 Water, Far Rockaway and Howard Beach in Queens,  
6 Coney Island, Mill Basin, Seagate and Gravesend in  
7 Brooklyn and in several different neighborhoods in  
8 Staten Island.

9                   Yet, even in many of those  
10 communities where there was widespread damage,  
11 these houses of worship transformed from places of  
12 prayer to community resource centers, serving food  
13 and water and providing clothing and essential  
14 supplies to those in need, regardless of race or  
15 religion.

16                   FEMA and HUD have been opposed to  
17 providing remediation to these damaged houses of  
18 prayer. While reimbursements from FEMA are made  
19 to specific programs run by houses of worship,  
20 such as soup kitchens, those reimbursements are  
21 exact and will only go towards the actual cost of  
22 running the program, with no additional aid to  
23 repair the structure of the building.

24                   Interestingly, precedents have been  
25 set for federal aid to disaster-damaged houses of

1  
2 worship. After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995,  
3 Congress overruled FEMA's refusal to provide  
4 assistance to damaged churches. In 2002, after an  
5 earthquake in Seattle, the Justice Department  
6 intervened to order FEMA to assist religious  
7 organizations damaged by the quake.

8           One would think that by now, after  
9 the largest and most devastating storm to ever hit  
10 New York, FEMA would understand that houses of  
11 worship that are in need of repair are eligible  
12 for funding, just like every other home and  
13 business on the block. But unfortunately, these  
14 houses of worship have been discouraged from  
15 applying for funding and those who have applied  
16 for assistance have been denied.

17           The time has come for common sense  
18 to inform federal policy. Superstorm Sandy did  
19 not discriminate among the neighborhoods that it  
20 destroyed. The houses of worship did not  
21 discriminate against those who congregated there  
22 for food, shelter, security and support. Many  
23 houses of worship actually provided space for  
24 FEMA, HUD and the SBA to host forums and provide  
25 information to the residents and therefore, these

1  
2 agencies should not discriminate against these  
3 houses of worship that are an essential part of  
4 the community and the fabric of our society.

5           It is within FEMA's purview to  
6 provide aid for not-for-profit organizations that  
7 provide community services and FEMA has been  
8 providing that assistance. But even if a houses  
9 of worship provides these same exact services as a  
10 not-for-profit, it'll be denied that same  
11 assistance because they are a religious  
12 institution. That is an outrage.

13           In the wake of Hurricane Sandy and  
14 every major disaster within recent memory,  
15 churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship  
16 have been essential in a community's recovery and  
17 response effort. Even while the church may have  
18 its eight-track system destroyed, it will welcome  
19 the homeless. Even while the synagogue may have  
20 been flooded, it will feed the hungry. Basic  
21 fairness and principles of nondiscrimination, let  
22 alone compassion should compel Congress and the  
23 executive branch to change policy and declare  
24 houses of worship eligible for disaster relief  
25 assistance administered by FEMA.

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2                   On behalf of the Union of Orthodox  
3 Jewish Congregations of America, we thank the New  
4 York City Council for realizing that houses of  
5 worship should be eligible for the same disaster  
6 assistance aid for the damage caused by Sandy that  
7 every home, business and not-for-profit  
8 organization is entitled to. We echo the call on  
9 the federal government to provide the aid so that  
10 these houses of worship that have provided so much  
11 for so many could complete their own recovery and  
12 continue their service to the community. Thank  
13 you for your time.

14                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
15 very much. We've been joined by Jimmy Van Bramer.  
16 My colleagues have a few questions. Mr. Pollock,  
17 they want to ask you some questions. First, we'll  
18 hear from Council Member Vallone then followed by  
19 Council Member Fidler.

20                   COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.  
21 Just one or two quick ones. Mr. Pollock, can you  
22 tell us more about the CDBG funds, and what we can  
23 do right now with the city and state funding?

24                   DAVID POLLOCK: Well, in the  
25 current Sandy supplemental aid package, there was

1  
2 a whole package of community development block  
3 grant money that has gone to the city and the  
4 state. The Mayor announced four different  
5 programs and a dozen programs that he was going to  
6 use to--he was going to present that would be  
7 using some of that CDBG money. We hope that it  
8 doesn't use all of the money. The Governor has  
9 also announced programs. For example, the buyback  
10 programs for homeowners are going to come out of  
11 that CDBG money. But it is not exhausted, and we  
12 feel that this is another avenue that can help  
13 make nonprofits, including, including houses of  
14 worship, give them a chance to get started again.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I hadn't  
16 thought of that. It's interesting. So I will be  
17 putting in another resolution calling on the  
18 Governor and the Mayor to use the money they have  
19 now with the community development block grants to  
20 assist houses of worship while we wait for the  
21 federal government to get their act together.  
22 That's very interesting.

23 DAVID POLLOCK: By the way, one  
24 other point that the secretary of HUD has already  
25 indicated that he would support use of CDBG money

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for such purposes, including houses of worship.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: All right.

Normally, I have lots of questions but this is pretty simple and I don't need to actually question you about the damages that were suffered and the work you did since we were all down so often and saw it for ourselves. So, again, thank you for being there for our communities from the moment the storm hit until today.

It really is amazing, even when you go down there, the volunteers that you bring down every weekend and during the week. It's just amazing all the different color shirts you see with the different churches and synagogues and mosques and all the volunteers. Amazing stuff. More volunteers than federal employees, obviously. I don't want to hold things up. Thank you all again.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you, Council Member Vallone. Council Member Fidler?

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is really truly a great day at the Council. Not only do we get a panel of so many longstanding good friends, but we started the



1  
2 day off with Council Member Vallone and  
3 Councilwoman Foster coming together in a Kumbaya  
4 moment. We don't see that often. Maybe tomorrow,  
5 Mayor Bloomberg and I will agree about what's  
6 appropriate on the Brooklyn College campus, too,  
7 so who knows.

8                   You know, Chairman Recchia and I  
9 both represent a large swath of the Southern  
10 Brooklyn waterfront. I do want to echo some of  
11 the things that were said earlier. In Gerritsen  
12 Beach, St. James Church was under ten feet of  
13 water. Resurrection opened its doors to a shelter  
14 for the Gerritsen Beach community. The first  
15 truckload of goods that came to Gerritsen Beach  
16 came through Bishop DiMarzio. Canarsie, the first  
17 food, hot food and supplies we got came from the  
18 churches in Sheepshead Bay and the rest of the  
19 southern Brooklyn waterfront, Manhattan Beach and  
20 whatnot, the organizations affiliated with COJO of  
21 Flatbush and Aguath Israel were the first ones in.  
22 It was truly weeks before government actually got  
23 in there and even came close to doing what our  
24 religious institutions do. So the issue here  
25 today should never be one of, you know, who

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stepped up and what your need is because that--you know, anyone who would question that, you know, just wasn't there.

So I added my name as a sponsor of this Preconsidered Reso yesterday, despite the fact that one of my colleagues questioned whether or not it would, in fact, be constitutional. I would, of course always be aggressive about erring on the side of common sense and decency and worrying about the Constitution later.

I do want to ask you, David, in particular, you mentioned the case law being vague and being a lawyer that, of course, caught my interest. Could you take us a little bit through that issue? So that perhaps we can couch our support for this resolution in a way that would be most constitutionally permissible.

DAVID POLLOCK: I will be happy to. There has been a legal memo written and I will be happy to submit it to the--

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
The legal memo that you're talking about, it's in the packet of all Council Members. You see that? The Department of Justice gave a memo on this.

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It's laid out in the packet that you have.

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Basically, the bottom line, the Justice Department providing FEMA aid to houses of worship would not run contrary to the Constitution and be consistent with the Supreme Court decisions. So there was a memo that was written by the Department of Justice in 2002. It's in everybody's packet.

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DAVID POLLOCK: By the way, houses of worship are eligible for Homeland Security grants, many of you know. You know, the Department of Homeland Security, as a matter of fact, recognizes special risks of religious institutions, some religious institutions, and considers that in the weighting process.

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So the constitutional law, the case law in the Supreme Court has really progressed since *Lemon v Kurtz*. Going to Tanisha's nodding with me, and going to the current state where neutral programs can go to all nonprofits, broadly based neutral programs can go to all nonprofits, and you cannot discriminate against houses of worship.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Council Member Oliver Koppell?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Thank you,  
3 Mr. Chairman. Since the subject was just raised  
4 by Council Member Fidler and I did ask, I want to  
5 thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank counsel Tanisha  
6 Edwards for the memo that she wrote, which reviews  
7 the Supreme Court precedent and also makes  
8 reference to the memo you mentioned, Mr. Chairman,  
9 in the packet, from the Department of Justice.

10 I might note, so people understand  
11 it, that that memo from the Department of Justice,  
12 which I've had an opportunity to review just now,  
13 is quite interesting, quite thorough and also  
14 makes clear that this is far from a crystal clear  
15 issue. I'm glad I raised it. But I am persuaded  
16 by the memo from the Justice Department and  
17 Tanisha Edwards' memo that this program can be  
18 seen and should be seen as a program of general  
19 application, similar to programs that, for  
20 instance, provide fire and police protection to  
21 churches, which have been upheld by the Supreme  
22 Court. This is not a program specifically aimed  
23 at religious institutions in any way and is going  
24 to be administered in a nondiscriminatory way and  
25 doesn't, therefore, pose the issue of whether

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2 government is either establishing religion or in  
3 one way or another excessively entangling  
4 government in religious exercise.

5           So while I think the question is  
6 not 100 percent clear, I am persuaded that the  
7 better authority is to permit it and therefore, I  
8 am going to vote aye and think that one can vote  
9 aye consistent with one's understanding of the  
10 Constitution, which I think we're all sworn to  
11 uphold. Not as an afterthought, by the way, but  
12 as a principle of the way we govern. I really  
13 appreciate, Mr. Chairman that you took the time  
14 with your staff to look into this carefully.

15           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you,  
16 Mr. Koppell. You brought the issue up and we  
17 addressed it yesterday afternoon. We did intense  
18 legal research. We were in touch with the  
19 Department of Justice. So for those of you who  
20 are not clear exactly, in 2002 there was a memo  
21 from the Department of Justice that basically said  
22 on a case by case--every application for houses of  
23 worship, funding could be given to them, but it  
24 has to be done on a case by case basis. The memo  
25 goes out in much more detail, but I just gave you

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2 the quick version. We didn't come here today to  
3 get a lecture on constitutional law. If you'd  
4 like more information on that or a copy of that,  
5 you could call my attorney, Tanisha Edwards. You  
6 could see her after the hearing. We will give you  
7 the--

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DAVID POLLOCK: Excuse me. We will  
submit some additional memoranda to the Council.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Thank  
you very much. Thank you very much to the panel.  
Call the next panel please. I just want to note  
to all my colleagues, we're not voting. Please  
call the next panel.

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TANISHA EDWARDS: Reverend Cheryl  
Anthony, Dr. Paul de Vries, Reverend Chris Dito,  
and Reverend Alonzo Jordan.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Just  
so my colleagues know, we are not voting on this  
reso today. We're going to take testimony from  
everyone today and then I will call another  
hearing for a vote on this. Whoever would like to  
go first on the panel, state your name and what  
church you're from.

25

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: I'm Dr. Paul de

1 Vries, President of New York Divinity School.

2 Many of our students are in affected areas.

3 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Hold on.

4 We've been joined by Council Member Diana Reyna  
5 and Council Member Al Vann. Go ahead.

6 DR. PAUL DE VRIES: Again, thank  
7 you, Chairman Recchia and all the council people  
8 as well. I appreciate this opportunity to share.

9 We became very involved because  
10 more than 75 of our students were involved in a  
11 ton of volunteer activity of helping to clean up,  
12 and counsel people and reach out to people in many  
13 different ways. I have this handout here called  
14 "Fixing Ugly," because I think this policy is a  
15 very ugly policy in terms of transforming attitude  
16 of what community means when very much a part of  
17 the fabric of community are our synagogues,  
18 churches and mosques.

19 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Hold on.

20 Could we please keep the conversations--if you  
21 have to talk, just take them outside? Go ahead.  
22 I'm sorry to interrupt you.

23 DR. PAUL DE VRIES: On the second  
24 page of my statement, I list four reasons why I  
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think this problem needs to be addressed.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Hold on.

Wait until we have that please. Okay.

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: Right, "Fixing Ugly." Introductory comments at the first page, and then on the back, on the second page, I give my four arguments. So I'll just bypass the introductory comments and focus on these four arguments, some of which have been stated nicely already today.

You know, first of all, this policy treats churches as outsiders, even though the churches have been there all the time. If the issue is that churches draw people to God, a lot of homes do that and even stores. Worship occurs not only in churches but in clubs, in offices, in bars, many different places. If being a place of worship is a problem, then a whole lot of organizations that will receive help would be treated differently. But no, churches are the bedrock of the communities and their God orientation should not take away from their endorsement with that money that is passed out will still say "In God we trust."



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2 My second argument, and by the way  
3 I make a comment here, perhaps unrelated, but we  
4 believe that churches should be treated equally  
5 also when it comes to renting facilities in  
6 schools.

7 Second, this discrimination against  
8 the local churches seems to open the door for  
9 other risky discrimination. If our devotion to  
10 God should keep churches from FEMA grants, what  
11 about the fire department aid, which was alluded  
12 to a moment ago, or police protection or long  
13 established government services of other sorts?  
14 If these fine benefits to churches continue with  
15 taxpayer support, should FEMA grants also. So, if  
16 we deny FEMA protection to churches now, are we  
17 starting a sinister, slippery slope? I hope not.  
18 I feel already today, with the attitude of the  
19 Council Members here and testimony that we can fix  
20 this thing.

21 Third, cutting off these sorts of  
22 grants ignores the immensely positive role that  
23 churches have already played after Superstorm  
24 Sandy. You know, even before government aid from  
25 the state or city came to affected areas, Governor

1  
2 Cuomo showed up, but you know what aid he helped  
3 distribute? Convoy of Hope aid, which came from a  
4 Protestant group in the Midwest that I helped  
5 support. So it was exciting seeing the Governor  
6 help unload the aid from a church group. Now it's  
7 time for the Governor to help, you know, return  
8 the favor and benefit those churches that reached  
9 out.

10 By the way, had those churches not  
11 been there, Convoy of Hope would not be there  
12 giving out the aid, millions, tens of millions of  
13 dollars worth of aid from other parts of the  
14 United States. Their conduit is churches, and by  
15 churches, I include, you know, synagogues, and  
16 mosques and other houses of worship.

17 To go to halfway through that  
18 paragraph, thousands of churches were trusted  
19 conduits of tons of generous gifts from all over  
20 America and the world. To not help the churches  
21 with damaged buildings is to say we do not care if  
22 these churches are fully operational the next time  
23 in the next emergency. And yet all items would be  
24 unimaginably worse if in the next emergency the  
25 presently damaged church buildings are not there

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2 and open and with good people offering generous  
3 help the next time as they did this time.

4 Fourth, which I have not yet heard  
5 today, so if you're kind of phasing out, and  
6 saying, well we heard those before, the fourth  
7 point I believe has not been expressed today.

8 Blocking FEMA grants to churches is to pretend to  
9 be ignorant of the continuing soul care needed by  
10 many and various victims of Superstorm Sandy.

11 Churches are not buildings, but the  
12 people, the men and women, boys and girls in  
13 damaged areas who are suffering in so many other  
14 ways already. Instead of the additional,  
15 substantial and even debilitating sacrifice and  
16 burden of rebuilding their church buildings, these  
17 struggling victims will continue to need safe  
18 sanctuary. Repair churches to seek and find  
19 enduring soul strength and the desire to serve  
20 others, the soul strength that they desire and  
21 deserve.

22 So, just to summarize, this new  
23 FEMA policy is ugly because it's senseless  
24 discrimination, a step down an insane and sinister  
25 slope, a severe penalty for the great and generous

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2 deeds done in the present and we know will be done  
3 in the future, and a mindless undermining of the  
4 priceless soul care needed by a huge variety of  
5 superstorm victims that those churches need to be  
6 functional to support.

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8 So I say in my last paragraph, for  
9 God's sake, for New York's sake, for the people's  
10 sake, let's urge our leaders in the White House  
11 and Congress to fix this vicious ugliness in the  
12 FEMA policy.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
very much.

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DR. PAUL DE VRIES: Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Reverend  
Anthony?

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Good morning. Chairman Recchia, we  
want to salute you and commend you for bringing  
together the City Council to address the issue. I  
want to say good morning to my council person, Al  
Vann, and thank both of you for the support that  
you have given us over the years.

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REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: I'm delighted  
to be here this morning to testify in support of  
houses of worship affected by Superstorm Sandy. I

1  
2 want to say that for 15 years, Judah International  
3 Christian Center, which is a multifaceted national  
4 recognized faith-based organization, for which I  
5 have the privilege of serving as its founder and  
6 Chief Operating Officer, has been involved in  
7 delivering holistic services to communities not  
8 only citywide but nationally.

9           Currently, I serve as the chair of  
10 the Brooklyn Long Term Recovery Group, dealing  
11 with the unmet needs from Superstorm Sandy. I am  
12 president of Women of Faith Advocating Change,  
13 which is an organization of faith leaders, female  
14 faith leaders from across this city.

15           In the passing of the 1996  
16 legislation, with many things directed toward how  
17 it would impact our communities for change, as a  
18 part of the team that crafted the Charitable  
19 Choice legislation, both nationally with Senator  
20 Ashcroft and statewide with former governor George  
21 Pataki, this legislation was never intended to  
22 alienate, marginalize or prohibit houses of  
23 worship to collaborate with government. In fact,  
24 it was designed to strengthen that relationship.

25           To that end, houses of worship are

1  
2 pivotal to communities in that they provide not  
3 only spiritual nutriment and counsel but also  
4 social services that include food pantries,  
5 daycare and Head Start, after school tutoring  
6 programs, HIV and AIDS programs, substance abuse  
7 and mental health service, gang violence  
8 prevention, sheltering the homeless, teen  
9 pregnancy prevention. They collaborate with  
10 government in crime prevention. They do foster  
11 care and adoption services, the gun buyback  
12 program. They administer safe surrender and do  
13 immigrant services, just to name a few.

14 We realize that Sandy has caused  
15 many houses of worship to discontinue these and  
16 other vital services. Moreover, Sandy has  
17 destroyed the structure of many houses of worship  
18 and need government, private and material support  
19 to rebuild and restore.

20 In closing, I appeal to my fellow  
21 faith leaders and supporters to contact our U.S.  
22 congressional representatives to introduce, co-  
23 sponsor, and pass a resolution to amend the Robert  
24 T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency  
25 Assistance Act, and to allow aid to be given to

1  
2 houses of worship impacted by Superstorm Sandy.  
3 This assistance should be similar to that that was  
4 given to the nonprofits that were damaged by  
5 Sandy.

6 I also want to say that I have in  
7 my possession, "Mobilizing Faith Communities and  
8 Preparing Disaster," which is a document that has  
9 been--which is a training that's done by FEMA to  
10 faith communities, telling them what to do to  
11 prepare. If in fact they want us to partner with  
12 them in preparation, then they need to be able to  
13 support us in restructuring and rebuilding our  
14 community here in New York.

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay.

16 Reverend Anthony, the copy of that memo, was that  
17 put out by that group?

18 REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: This?

19 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yeah.

20 REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: This was put  
21 out by FEMA, and they've done a training. They  
22 did a training. The last training they did was in  
23 October, October 3, 2012. It was done in Alabama  
24 and it was saying to that region, who had been  
25 impacted by a disaster, how to prepare the faith

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community to address disaster.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: But it  
doesn't talk about getting money?

REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: No, it  
doesn't.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You know,  
that's--

REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: [interposing]  
And so--

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
Okay. I'm going to let everybody ask questions.  
The whole panel and then we'll ask questions. I  
just wanted to know what the document was so we  
could get a copy and we'd have it to put in our  
file. Thank you very much. Next.

REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: Good  
morning everyone.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: If you'd like  
to ask a question, please give your name to  
Tanisha Edwards and we'll go in order. Yes?

REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: Good  
morning everyone. My name is Reverend Christopher  
Dito from the International Christian Center on  
Staten Island. We are a 2,500 member Assemblies



1  
2 of God Church who operates from a multi-site  
3 periodogram. We have a main campus in the middle  
4 of Staten Island and we have two campuses, one on  
5 the north shore of Staten Island and one on the  
6 south shore of Staten Island.

7 On the south shore, we currently  
8 rent from New Dorp High School. It's good to see  
9 Councilman Cabrera here, who's been on the front  
10 lines with us, also Councilman Jackson, who  
11 represents us as we fight the battle for the  
12 houses of worship to rent from the New York City  
13 public schools. So I'd like to acknowledge their  
14 assistance with us.

15 I'd also like to thank the Chair,  
16 Councilman Recchia for bringing this to the  
17 forefront. I'd also like to thank Councilman  
18 Vallone, so accurately describing the events of  
19 what has happened in Brooklyn, Staten Island and  
20 Queens in the days immediately following the  
21 outpouring of the storm.

22 We are the church that is  
23 distributing from Convoy of Hope, Assemblies of  
24 God organization. We brought in 57 40-foot  
25 tractor-trailers of material, items, goods,

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2 clothing, just everything you can imagine, at our  
3 main campus, which is a 1,000-seat sanctuary,  
4 which was damaged by the storm. We had \$300,000  
5 worth of damage. You know what our insurance  
6 company told us? They told us that the sewer  
7 backed up and we're not going to cover you. Well,  
8 obviously, the sewer backed up.

9 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: But that  
10 might work to your advantage, because a lot of  
11 insurance policies, if it's a sewer backup they  
12 will cover you. That's what sounds very strange.  
13 So we'll follow up with that.

14 REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: In our main  
15 campus, we're using that as a distribution  
16 facility to reach the people in the different  
17 communities affected on Staten Island. As I  
18 wrote, our congregation rents from New Dorp High  
19 School on our south shore campus from 11 to 1:00  
20 on Sunday. Hurricane Sandy has directly  
21 devastated our community and congregation and the  
22 damage has touched the homes and the everyday  
23 lives of the people on Staten Island and New York  
24 City.

25 Our church has been active since

1  
2 the next day after Sandy's landfall, as Councilman  
3 Vallone most accurately pointed out, that we were  
4 the first boots on the ground for the following  
5 weeks and we still are. Setting up distribution  
6 centers along the south shore of Staten Island at  
7 various spots to distribute food, water, clothing,  
8 toys, perishable and nonperishable items.

9 We've given permanent and temporary  
10 shelter to those people dispersing clothing and  
11 counseling families and those that are emotionally  
12 distraught. During Thanksgiving week, we've used  
13 the main facility to distribute 120 turkey baskets  
14 to those in need in the community, whether they're  
15 Christian, Muslim, Jewish, it didn't matter, no  
16 discrimination involved. We were just giving out  
17 to those in need. During Christmastime, we gave  
18 out another 120 turkey baskets to those affected  
19 directly by the superstorm and thousands and  
20 thousands of dollars worth of toys to those  
21 children that lost everything during the storm.

22 We have teamed up with other  
23 churches to deliver meals and participate in the  
24 cleanup of the mold remediation. I have gotten a  
25 phone call two days ago from Convoy of Hope, who

1  
2 is going to send in 11 tractor trailers worth of  
3 sheetrock, beginning next week, for us to  
4 distribute to Brooklyn and to Queens and to Staten  
5 Island to help the people rebuild their homes,  
6 free of charge. Free of charge.

7                   Needless to say, it's been  
8 challenging to our bank account, as I'm sure the  
9 city can identify with that--

10                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
11 You have some other pastors out there that say we  
12 could use it.

13                   REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: See me  
14 after--

15                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
16 I see some of the pastors that I know shaking  
17 their head, saying we could use that sheetrock.  
18 Go ahead.

19                   REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: You could  
20 see me after we're done here. Gentlemen, I'll be  
21 glad to distribute that to you.

22                   The resolution presented would  
23 greatly increase the spectrum of funding  
24 available, thus making it possible for us to  
25 continue in the process of bringing restoration to

1  
2 the hardest hit areas of New York City. We are  
3 committed to the community for the long haul. Our  
4 homes are there, but more importantly, our hearts  
5 are there also.

6 Last week, and I want to be clear  
7 on this point and make sure everyone understands  
8 what is going to happen in the future. Last week,  
9 I met with a counselor from New Orleans who's  
10 still on the ground there. She says the after  
11 effects of Katrina, seven years out, seven years  
12 out, there was a huge spike in depression, a huge  
13 spike in suicide, a huge spike in divorce, and  
14 children began to start cutting themselves. What  
15 are we looking at? Substance abuse will be on the  
16 rise, and mental health issues will be on the  
17 rise. Now, people have lost everything and  
18 they're going to turn to various aspects to sort  
19 of comfort themselves. We intend to set up  
20 counseling centers and to use any and all funding  
21 that was going to help the community as we see  
22 what really is unveiled by this storm.

23 As a community and a church, we  
24 must come together to provide the physical,  
25 spiritual, mental and emotional needs for the

1  
2 people in New York City. Renting from New Dorp  
3 High School enabled us to reach the south shore  
4 community, who was directly hit. One of my  
5 congregants are here, Hector Ramirez, who had six  
6 feet of water come into his home. That night,  
7 they swam out with their family, barely making it  
8 out alive.

9           As Councilman Vallone said, we were  
10 the boots on the ground, the first ones there.  
11 Our main campus is the distribution center. I  
12 also wish to thank Speaker Quinn for taking the  
13 initiative on this resolution, and considering the  
14 houses of worship to receive disaster relief aid.  
15 I have submitted to the chair, Mr. Recchia, a  
16 three-minute video that actually shows us on the  
17 forefront, the boots on the ground during the  
18 devastation, giving out and distributing various  
19 food items and clothing to those in need.

20           Thank you, ladies and gentlemen for  
21 your time this morning.

22           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
23 very much. I have a copy of the video right here.  
24 If any Council Member wishes to see it, you can go  
25 to my Finance office and we'll show it to you.

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2 Next speaker?

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REV. ALONZO JORDAN: Good afternoon to the distinguished chair, Councilman Recchia, and to all the--

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing] Oh, hold on, before you move forward. We've been joined by Council Member David Greenfield and Council Member Fernando Cabrera from the Bronx.

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REV. ALONZO JORDAN: I'm a little embarrassed because I serve as the political action chair for the National Action Network. We were at Reverend Phil Craig's church the other night. We had the community forum for the candidates for District 31, which is Councilman Sander's seat and I believe he has some--I don't see anyone here. It wasn't brought up, and maybe in hindsight, I would say maybe I should have brought the question up about the houses of worship. I apologize, Chairman, for not preparing a statement. And I--

22

23

24

25

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing] That's okay. You know, we put this out. We sent out emails to all the churches. We sent out--it's been advertised on the websites. I personally

1

2

went out and I've been speaking at different

3

programs across the city. I've been getting

4

people to--

5

REV. ALONZO JORDAN: [interposing]

6

Yeah, I got wind of it at Dr. Waterburns

7

[phonetic] at Medgar Evers when you spoke there,

8

that's how I got wind of it. Also, I was over at

9

St. Mary's over on the island last week with the

10

Queens cluster over there.

11

In hindsight, and with all due

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respect, I took a quick glance at the proposal

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here, the proposition--the resolution, I'm sorry--

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and on page three, some of the things that stood

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out to me was like in quotations there at the top

16

paragraph was the primary use and further on down

17

is says primarily used.

18

The big question I guess everybody

19

have is why FEMA is doing this because usually the

20

churches are more or less the first responders.

21

As Dr. Anthony alluded to, we had a thing about

22

two years with Dr. Allen Hand [phonetic], Reverend

23

Washington Lundy [phonetic], over in Brooklyn

24

concerning this. Reverend Gwen [phonetic] and a

25

couple of other churches, was it Bethany on Gates



1  
2 Avenue, the pastor there--concerning this and  
3 getting the churches. And I even had gave it  
4 because I was doing some chaplaincy for State  
5 Senator Malcolm Smith--you all pray for me--

6 [Laughter]

7 REV. ALONZO JORDAN: And I left it  
8 on his desk as well, and I got little feedback  
9 from some of the Queens clusters over there. So  
10 the question why, but I thought about--not to get  
11 preachy--rending unto Cesar. It seemed like  
12 they're splitting hairs here, Councilman Recchia.  
13 The first panel that came on was very  
14 enlightening, not to say the least, on how they  
15 brought understanding to the constitution. But  
16 it's a play words. In hindsight, I know we're  
17 pressed for time. I thought about fractional  
18 division. If it's a time factor they're looking  
19 for that maybe we could go at this they're saying  
20 the primary use.

21 Well how much time do you have in  
22 church? Is it 70 percent worship or 70 percent of  
23 the outreach that they're actually doing in the  
24 community as opposed to 30 percent? Then the  
25 primary use would be, you know, what FEMA is

1

2 actually here. So they're kind of playing with  
3 words here and splitting hairs and seem a little  
4 bit hypocritical, FEMA is, in what they're saying.  
5 So that's all I wanted to get and just go on  
6 board.

7

8 Once again, I apologize. I'm  
9 surprised there's no one here from District 31.  
10 I'm on the other side with Councilman Leroy Comrie  
11 in Cambria Heights, so--

12

13 COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic] We are

14

15 here.

16

17 REV. ALONZO JORDAN: Oh, you are

18

19 here. I do apologize.

20

21 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. My  
22 colleagues have questions, but before we move  
23 forward, I just want to personally thank everyone  
24 in this room for opening up your houses of worship  
25 and helping the people who were devastated. I  
just want to thank my colleague Fernando Cabrera  
because when this first happened, he called me up  
in Coney Island and he says I'm going to get you  
some trailers full of food and stuff. I said we  
need all the help we can get.

26

I have to tell you something, a

1  
2 group by the name of Operation Blessings came in.  
3 I have to tell you something, I have never seen an  
4 organization like this come in a disaster. They  
5 knew exactly what to do, how to organize, how to  
6 line up, how to give out, what to do. We were  
7 doing--you know, we never had experience doing  
8 this; we were just giving it out. They said, no,  
9 you got to put it in boxes; you've got to do this.  
10 I mean, I've learned so much. I've got to tell  
11 you something, you know what's said, I don't even  
12 think the people in OEM knew how to organize and  
13 put this all together like the way this one group  
14 from the south, I believe they were from, right  
15 Council Member?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

17 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: They did a  
18 great job. I am like until today like just saying  
19 oh my god. I've never seen an operation like  
20 this. All right, so, Fernando Cabrera, do you  
21 have some questions?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you  
23 so much, Chair Recchia. I want to personally  
24 thank you for having this hearing and for Council  
25 Member Vallone for taking the lead on this

1  
2 resolution. I want to thank all of the ministers,  
3 pastors, rabbis, imams that are here today. As a  
4 fellow clergy member, I'm a pastor of a church as  
5 well; I know the load that you carry. It's not  
6 easy as it is, working with so many volunteers,  
7 with such a low budget, and yet you've been asked  
8 to do so much.

9                   If I could just take a step back to  
10 those days immediately after Sandy, the government  
11 came short. We know that they were not getting--  
12 everybody knows here, all the Council Members  
13 know. We heard the briefings. We were not  
14 getting the sufficient amount of bottled waters  
15 that were due to our people. Food was not coming  
16 in. It was the houses of worship.

17                   We ran an operation on the  
18 Kingsbridge Armory, and I want to thank the Mayor  
19 for allowing us to have that stage there of  
20 operation. We had hundreds upon hundreds of tons  
21 of supplies that came through there. It was  
22 mainly people of faith that came in there, working  
23 24 hours a day for 24 days straight--nobody was  
24 getting paid for doing that--getting it to the  
25 Council Members and to the houses of worship.

1  
2                   What struck me the most during that  
3 time, it was pastors who lost their houses of  
4 worship, pastors who lost even their home that  
5 were coming in. They were coming in and they were  
6 getting supplies for their people and for their  
7 community. They were not even thinking about  
8 themselves. It shocks me that the federal  
9 government, who fell short, the city fell short,  
10 and now we're asking really pennies on the dollars  
11 of what was invested into our community, that it's  
12 such a resistant.

13                   In the last almost 200 years, 200  
14 years in the history of the United States, this  
15 was not the case. It's never been the case. All  
16 we've got to do is look at history. Never in the  
17 history of the United States do we see such an  
18 antagonistic, anti-religious sentiment. I don't  
19 know where it's coming from. I do know where it's  
20 coming from, with people with agendas, who think  
21 that somehow, we're working against their agenda,  
22 and we're not. We're about people. You're about  
23 people. So I want to thank you for the work that  
24 you are doing.

25                   I was in Katrina, working there. I

1  
2 was there in Haiti as well. As a licensed mental  
3 health counselor, Pastor, you are so on the money.  
4 We are not done. The after effects are about to  
5 take place. If we don't have the infrastructure  
6 of the people to provide existential hope, this is  
7 something government cannot provide. This is not  
8 something that even other nonprofits can provide.  
9 Really, the people of faith, and even sociologists  
10 will tell you, society, in order for it to work,  
11 you've got to have the people of faith in that  
12 community at work. So you bring that hope. If  
13 you're not there to provide that hope, who is  
14 going to give that type of hope that is so  
15 desperately needed?

16 I also see a dichotomy here, which  
17 is--Pastor, you mentioned that you're renting from  
18 a public school. It's ironic that we haven't been  
19 able to get a resolution through this body to tell  
20 our state people to allow the houses of worships,  
21 just like in every other state, every other major  
22 city, to be able to operate a public school. The  
23 reality is that if we didn't have that in place,  
24 we were not in court fighting for this, you would  
25 not be able to operate out of where you're

1

2 operating right now, out of that school, not only  
3 you, the other schools. So if we are for this, we  
4 have to be for the other stuff. We have to be  
5 consistent.

6

7 So not only that, we have other  
8 issues that Council Member Peter Vallone, in terms  
9 of providing security to religious institutions,  
10 you know just equity, all we're asking is for  
11 equity.

12

13 So I know I'm doing a lot of  
14 talking here and this is very personal to me, but  
15 I saw that you went into action. I want to thank  
16 every pastor, every rabbi, every imam or any other  
17 religious leader that is here, for the work that  
18 you are doing. You are to be commended. You  
19 should have been up in front in that list, from  
20 FEMA to say we're going to help you. You were  
21 there for us. This is not establishment of a  
22 particular religion. That's what the intent of  
23 the constitution was. This is about helping those  
24 who are helping us and still going to help us. So  
25 I want to thank you so much.

26

27 Let me ask you this one question.  
28 This resolution coming forward, what else can we

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do to help you, in the City Council?

REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: Not in reference to this resolution, but as you mentioned, Councilman Cabrera, is pass that 880, to allow us to continue to rent from the areas that we're renting from, high schools. I would encourage the Council to ask Speaker Quinn to put that bill to the floor, so we can continue to reach these areas. We're one church in the middle of Staten Island. But if we could go around in five other places and reach the community that has been devastated, that will be essentially helpful of giving us a point of contact with the people in that community. Not everyone can make it to the center of the island, so we have went out in various outposts. That would help us establish a stronghold in the community to continue--allow me to keep bringing in tons of things. Convoy of Hope out in the Midwest is willing to give us millions of dollars in items, from food to clothing to sheetrock to electrical material to rebuild these houses. We need to do this together though. We need to do this together. I can't do it without you and we provide one another



1  
2 essential assistance. So I would encourage to ask  
3 that, I believe it's 880, to be put to the floor  
4 to a vote. I believe we have the number of votes,  
5 32 out of 56, to get it passed and--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA:

7 [interposing] Thirty-six actually.

8 REV. CHRISTOPHER DITO: --to get it  
9 up to Albany. We've got to work together. Let's  
10 work together and together we can make a  
11 difference. We have to be in it for the long  
12 haul. It's not just today. It's five and seven  
13 years now, the lives we're going to touch and  
14 change. So that's what I would ask for additional  
15 assistance in.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you,  
17 Pastor. Reverend?

18 REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: I would ask  
19 for assistance. There is a document that has been  
20 sent to Speaker Quinn. We were able to partner  
21 with FEMA coming in, through their White House  
22 Office of Faith Based Initiatives. They sent a  
23 strike team to work with us. We have been  
24 coordinating and convening services for the  
25 different areas. We worked with Pastor Evan Gray

1  
2 [phonetic] out in Rockaway. We worked with Pastor  
3 Connis Mobley [phonetic] in Coney Island just  
4 looking at what was needed. We've worked with  
5 churches in Staten Island.

6           There's a document that was  
7 produced by FEMA. FEMA went out with their team  
8 with us, into Coney Island. They issued a  
9 document and the document identified, and the  
10 document is from the 24th of November, that what  
11 was going on in Coney Island. They issued this  
12 document, sent it up the chain, sent it to OEM.  
13 They disputed it. They said that the things in  
14 the document were not true and so therefore they  
15 didn't act. If you will allow me just to read a  
16 little bit of this document.

17           COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: It'll be  
18 interesting. Yes.

19           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Just a little  
20 bit.

21           REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: Just a little  
22 bit. It says African American coalition of  
23 health, mental health leaders, most are ministers  
24 as well, have organized a daily call, 3 to 4, to  
25 discuss current and ongoing needs of constituents

1  
2 in Coney Island, Queens and the other Brooklyn  
3 areas. The call has been open to faith-based,  
4 community-based organizations impacted as well as  
5 local, state and federal partners.

6 So what's being said, it said  
7 today, the 24th, a team of 85 specialists complete  
8 a full ground sweep, no buildings of Coney Island,  
9 approximately 3.4 square miles. A series of  
10 continuing and in some cases expanding unmet needs  
11 were identified among roughly 500 residents  
12 encountered and the residents encountered  
13 represented a small pool of the population with  
14 critical unmet needs. Now this is FEMA's report,  
15 not ours.

16 Generally, those encountered were  
17 the younger, able-bodied residents who had the  
18 physical and mobility capacity to leave their  
19 residents in search of critical resources, food,  
20 water, clothing and cleaning supplies. Mobility  
21 is a serious issue in Coney Island. While there  
22 are limited American Red Cross trucks--they  
23 observed two--a small feeding operation being led  
24 by local churches, most residents are physically  
25 not capable of descending 14 flights of stairs,

1

2 walking 5 to 6 blocks to stand in long lines,  
3 gathering a minimal amount of food and supplies,  
4 to haul the materials back up the 14 flights to  
5 their homes and apartments. This work is being  
6 done by the church.

7

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: God bless.

8

Could we have a copy of that, Reverend Anthony?

9

REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: Yes.

10

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: All right,

11

we'll make a copy of that. Let me just tell you

12

something. We were out there in Coney Island. It

13

was tough. You know what I mean. That's why I

14

have to say the community came together; we fought

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for our own. Let me tell you something, I was

16

screaming every minute of the day. We were out

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there. My staff worked around the clock. But

18

yes, there's a lot more to do.

19

What we have to do is learn from

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our mistakes. If you saw two weeks ago, we had a

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hearing with NYCHA. I was in the *Daily News*

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because I laid it on the line that there was no

23

point person, no one to go to, to figure out which

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apartments had the disabled, which apartments

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there were people who were still in there. But we

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will learn that, we'll figure it out. We'll work on a plan on how to make it better. I want to thank you all.

Council Member Diana Reyna and Council Member Vallone have questions for this panel. So they're going to ask you questions. Short, because I have a lot more people that want to testify.

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: Churches were reimbursed not only for aid after Katrina but money to help rebuild too. So that's another example.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: I know, that's why we--

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: [interposing] Right. And then before that, I was in another town where there was 20 feet of water in the streets. It completely covered the Methodist church and destroyed it. The Baptist church that I was serving it wasn't touched because we were up on a hill. So we were providing services for everybody. In the end, the Methodist church got aid to help rebuild, from the federal government, and we Baptists were glad. So no differences--

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]

And that's what we're trying to do now is to get aid and money for all these churches to rebuild. The churches are saying we've got to move forward. We have no place to hold our services on the weekend; we have no place to go.

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: Right.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: That's why we're trying to get this moving quickly.

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: The other area we could very powerfully collaborate would be in the area of helping children at risk in terms of educational skills and helping build families to be more of a positive environment for learning. I just throw that out. We're heading up a program for that. We'd love to talk to any of the council people.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yes. Diana Reyna and then Council Member Vallone.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to follow your line of questioning when you were referring to the manual that was shown by Reverend Anthony to be able to understand whether or not any training has

1  
2 occurred by FEMA in New York, or more specifically  
3 New York City, based on that manual, as you have  
4 mentioned has been done elsewhere in the United  
5 States.

6 REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: It has not  
7 been done in New York. What FEMA has done is gone  
8 into communities. Let me just say, in some  
9 instances, FEMA has been very helpful and in  
10 instances I think that FEMA did not understand  
11 that faith organizations do more than just have  
12 church. So when they send people to our  
13 community, they always send someone from the faith  
14 community to talk to us--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:

16 [interposing] As opposed to FEMA officials--

17 REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: [interposing]  
18 As opposed to someone from the economic  
19 development, as opposed to someone from, you know,  
20 infrastructure building. But I think that it is  
21 to quiet us, in order to quiet our congregations  
22 to let them know everything is going to be all  
23 right, and in fact, it was not.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Correct. As  
25 far as an official request to FEMA for that

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training, has that been communicated?

REV. CHERYL ANTHONY: It has not.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Can you officially request to FEMA and give us a copy of that letter? Mr. Chair, I'd like to just ask if there's an opportunity to accompany this resolution with what would be an official request from the Council for that training.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: What we'll do is we're going to pass this reso and then we will send a letter to FEMA with all those Council Members that wish to sign on, requesting a FEMA training session in all different communities throughout.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I'd like to be associated to this bill and that letter.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I want to just echo the sentiments of all of my colleagues that have been already shared. Without our houses of worship, we could not rebuild community. I know that you are the central nucleus to community. Community does not exist without a house of worship.



1  
2 I just wanted to share, you know  
3 one of the first things my office and I were able  
4 to do was go to New Dorp community. We passed  
5 what was the central point of what ground zero  
6 looked like. That was a church that was a house  
7 of worship, I think it was a parking lot that was  
8 filled with clothes, water, food cans, just the  
9 bare essentials, and how volunteers giving up of  
10 their time coordinating all of that.

11 So the one thing that government  
12 still yet has to learn from the houses of worship  
13 is better coordination. You know how to do that.  
14 You do it on a daily basis. You do it so that  
15 it's taking in the whole person and its household,  
16 and what it is to live with the common sense of  
17 recovery, as opposed to looking at a manual. So  
18 thank you for your work, you service and God bless  
19 you all.

20 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Thank  
21 you. Council Member Vallone has a quick question.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.  
23 I just want to, again, thank Fernando Cabrera. I  
24 thanked him before he entered the room. I've been  
25 trying to move some bills I've had for a while on

1  
2 tax assistance for private schools and security,  
3 school safety officers for private schools. We  
4 provide nurses. What's more important than safety  
5 in today's environment? They are the number on  
6 target, our private schools, of terrorists. I'm  
7 Public Safety Chair; I know that. Since the  
8 orchestra is playing, I have to stop asking my  
9 questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [off mic]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Some very  
12 slow person's phone. So I've been trying to move  
13 those bills for a while. Now, since Fernando has  
14 been elected, it's awesome to have a partner who  
15 is as dedicated to these issues as he is, and  
16 clergy, of course. It's been an honor to stand  
17 with him on bills like 880. I've been at every  
18 rally he's held on that, and he's had a lot of  
19 them. So he's very dedicated. I look forward to  
20 working with him. On this one also, he was a  
21 force behind it.

22 Quickly, one of the ways I know,  
23 because you said how I was accurately depicting  
24 what happened. The day after Sandy, my Facebook  
25 page blew up with people wanting to help, from all

1  
2 over Queens. I was calling every city agency, and  
3 nothing. First, you couldn't get through. They  
4 wanted to know where to drop the stuff off. So I  
5 finally said, you know, just bring it to my  
6 office. Wednesday morning into Thursday, I had a  
7 room bigger than this, full of stuff. Calling up  
8 again, how can you get it down there to them? We  
9 can pick it up three weeks from this Thursday.  
10 That's what they, Red Cross, OEM, that's what they  
11 were telling me.

12           So we just came up on our own, you  
13 know I'm going to go around to the fire department  
14 around the corner. I did, and the fire guys came  
15 over. It was a freezing cold night. It was like  
16 9:00 at night. They came over, loaded up the fire  
17 trucks, loaded up the ambulances, and brought it  
18 down. They told me, we didn't know where to bring  
19 it. I don't remember what churches they brought  
20 it to, because it was a long time ago, but that's  
21 where they had to bring it to because there was no  
22 place else for the fire department to bring this  
23 stuff.

24           Since then, like all of my elected  
25 compatriots here, you know we've had to do--I have

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to apologize, occasionally we have to do the photo op thing with loading the trucks and stuff. We don't want to. But if we don't, then we get grief. Why aren't you down there? So we're stuck in a catch-22. If we do it, it looks silly. If we don't do it, our constituents say why aren't you down there?

I've also been driving up and down Rockaways until the cold wave happened, on my Harley, in disguise, just driving up and down, one end to the other, almost every weekend, just to see how things are going. That's how I know that it's you guys out there all the time with the volunteers.

So the quick question I have--is it de Vries, is that how you pronounce it?

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay. You said that after FEMA, the churches did get grants? Is that something you have personal knowledge of?

DR. PAUL DE VRIES: [off mic] With Katrina.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: After Katrina. I'm sorry.

1  
2 DR. PAUL DE VRIES: [off mic] It  
3 was actually the church I described, with the  
4 Methodist church being inundated many years ago  
5 when I pastured in Virginia. That was before  
6 FEMA, but it was still federal money to help the  
7 Methodist church to rebuild, because we advocated  
8 for them. They were part of the community.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: It was  
10 before FEMA? Wasn't FEMA in big trouble after  
11 Katrina?

12 DR. PAUL DE VRIES: I'm speaking of  
13 my personal experience where there was 20 feet of  
14 water in the streets and the Methodist church was  
15 destroyed. This goes back in the early 70s.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So after  
17 Katrina, was FEMA money given?

18 DR. PAUL DE VRIES: FEMA money was  
19 given for churches to reimburse them for clothing  
20 and food and so forth that they had given out, as  
21 well as for rebuilding.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: This is  
23 something you were all aware of. Oh, is there a  
24 difference of opinion on that? Oh, you were just  
25 not aware of it. Okay.

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2

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: No, but we

3

were.

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COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You were?

5

Okay, Domenic, thank you.

6

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: That's why

7

we're trying to move this resolution. We're

8

trying to--

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COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE:

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[interposing] Just more evidence that it's

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possible.

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[Crosstalk]

13

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Basically, we

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have to be vocal on this in the city. We have to

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get FEMA's attention on it that we're just not

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going to sit back and not do anything as a city

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council. All right, we're going to fight jointly

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with the faith-based community, because together

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we're going to send a strong message out there.

20

We need funding for our houses of worship.

21

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I couldn't

22

think of a better chair to have on our side either

23

than Domenic Recchia.

24

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you.

25

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: By the

1  
2 way, the first hearing after Sandy was my  
3 committee, and we had Deputy Mayor Halloway  
4 sitting here, Cas Halloway sitting there, and I  
5 told him exactly what I just said today about  
6 there being no city involvement. He disagreed,  
7 obviously. We say the same thing to them that  
8 we're saying in this room. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
10 very much. Okay, call the next panel. We've also  
11 been joined by Council Member Leroy Comrie.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Mr. Chair?

13 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I just want  
15 to note that I'd like my name put on the  
16 resolution.

17 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: So  
18 recognized.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I just want  
20 to echo everything. I heard the last part of what  
21 Council Member Vallone was saying, but I told him  
22 I would go on the resolution when he told me about  
23 it. I had to leave early the day that the  
24 resolution was presented. That's the only reason  
25 why I didn't go on it originally. I think that

1  
2 it's important that we do everything we can to  
3 support the houses of worship, especially when  
4 there has been precedence set to make sure that  
5 they are compensated in other places. I don't  
6 understand why it's taking the congressional  
7 delegation so long to move the money and why the  
8 bureaucracy is taking so long to move the money  
9 and why they're trying to retarget or do different  
10 things in New York than they've done in the rest  
11 of the country. I will be working with all of you  
12 to make sure that we have a strong voice to make  
13 sure that that's turned around.

14                   It's unfortunate. Water has no  
15 friends. It has no alliances. It makes no  
16 political affiliations. It makes no religious  
17 affiliations. Clearly, as Council Member Vallone  
18 said, the devastation out on the Rockaway needs to  
19 be healed universally, without thought to any  
20 religious background or any religious affiliation.  
21 The churches in the Rockaways are the key part of  
22 the resurrection and the salvation of the  
23 Rockaways during Hurricane Sandy and in general.  
24 So I don't understand why this is not being done.  
25 I'm sorry; I just wanted to make my small piece



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said before the rest of the panels come forward.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you very much. Call the next panel please.

TANISHA EDWARDS: Steven Frohlich, Augustin Quiles, Pastor Mobley and Rabbi Merenfeld.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Put the microphone on. It's on. Whoever would like to go first could go.

STEVEN FROHLICH: My name is Steven Frohlich, President of the Young Israel of Brighton Beach, which happens to be in Mike Nelson's district. However, I live in Domenic's district. I want to start off by commending the councilman. I was on a ride along, I think Sunday right after the flood, right after that, and right after Sandy, I should say. We ended up in Coney Island, by MCU Park. The conversation was how can we bring more food, what do we do with all the clothes? The staff, the councilman and the people running it was fantastic. What were they worried about? The next day, what do we do with the kids that have no school? So I think that the 60 community brought trucks--

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]

We had a day for all the children.

STEVEN FROHLICH: Of fun, for all the children. This is what was going on in the Coney Island area, thanks to our councilman.

I have a statement here, but basically the summation of the statement is that I was there. My synagogue is on Brighton Fourth Street and Neptune Avenue. We had what you might call either backup sewer flood, whatever you want to call it. We had seven feet of water in the basement, which consists of classrooms, super's apartment, boiler room, electric room, and so on and so forth. We had four feet on the ground floor, which is the main sanctuary, commercial kitchen and dining area. We have a Head Start in the building.

What was our worries, that the next morning when I came in and we opened the kitchen was that I found out that the super had opened the building for the people in the neighborhood that were swimming, first walking and then swimming into the building because we have a second and third floor. I know we were packed. People were

1  
2 coming in, carrying their children on their heads.  
3 People were coming in, swimming into it with only  
4 the clothes on their back.

5           What we did is we opened the  
6 kitchen, we took everything out that was in the  
7 freezer and the refrigerator. We took sternos and  
8 we started warming up food. The Head Start didn't  
9 have school for about three weeks. So what we did  
10 is that since we were getting the milk, the bread,  
11 and the cheeses, we opened it up for the  
12 neighborhood. It didn't matter if you were  
13 Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, that never was a  
14 question. Everybody came in and was able to  
15 partake. People were bringing new clothes. We  
16 had people all over there for about, I'd say,  
17 about four to five weeks.

18           We had complete devastation.  
19 Complete devastation was when you walked in you  
20 thought that all you had to do was mop the floor,  
21 that all you had to do was wash the walls. But  
22 how can you allow Head Start children to come to  
23 school if you still have mold?

24           Personally, I live in Trump  
25 Village, which is right in the heart of the area,

1  
2 three blocks away from the Boardwalk, and there  
3 was no OEM. There was no Red Cross. There was no  
4 FEMA for ten days. Everyone talks about Coney  
5 Island; everyone talks about the Rockaways. Why?  
6 Because you can actually take a camera from the  
7 sky and look down and see devastation. Our  
8 neighborhood doesn't have devastation like that.  
9 We have devastation from within. The houses of  
10 worship, together with not only the synagogues but  
11 I've spoken to the imams, I've spoken to churches,  
12 and it's complete devastation from within. The  
13 walls have to be torn out. Everyone's electrical,  
14 which range from \$25,000 and up. What about  
15 boilers? Every other day, our boiler is--who know  
16 how it's going to last throughout the winter.

17 I had to fight with National Grid  
18 because the coldest day of the year, we couldn't  
19 get gas to the building. They can't understand  
20 why you can't get gas to the building, and I'm  
21 telling them there must be a leak in the pipe that  
22 allowed water to freeze. They're saying it's  
23 impossible. Three days later, we had to close the  
24 school. People weren't able to send their kids to  
25 Head Start. Three days later, they tore up the

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street and changed the pipe and it's working

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beautifully.

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I mean, there is no leadership in this from Sandy. There is no one to turn to and

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say what could we do. Yes, we have Jewish JCRC.

7

Yes, we have UJA Federation. We have all these

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organizations, but everyone says fill out your

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PNP, fill out your FEMA form, fill our your SBA

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form, but to what end? We are housing three

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synagogues in our building. To what end is this?

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How do we pay back a contractor who did x amount

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of work and we don't know how we're going to pay

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him? How do we rebuild a synagogue that, okay, we

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put the--you know, thank you for offering rock,

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but we sheetrocked. Up to four feet you now have

17

the concrete rock. We're trying to learn from it.

18

We were there but the city, state and federal

19

government weren't. Thank you.

20

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Pastor

21

Quiles?

22

PASTOR AGUSTIN QUILES: Council

23

Member Recchia and Council Members, thank you for

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allowing us to be here. I identify myself with

25

every problem that has been mentioned. My church

1  
2 was totally lost. I'm on Mermaid and 21st Street.  
3 My house was totally lost. And even though we  
4 have losses, we put everything to the side and the  
5 third day of the storm we opened up the church.  
6 We did emergency demolition and we started helping  
7 the community, giving out clothes, giving out hot  
8 meals. We even sent people out with hot meals, to  
9 the houses where they couldn't come out, and sick.  
10 They help on the churches because they didn't want  
11 to leave their houses unattended, afraid that  
12 people could go in and take whatever value was  
13 left.

14           The summary, because everybody is  
15 here with the same problem, all the churches in  
16 Coney Island has been devastated. Some of the  
17 churches have been helping. They're still under  
18 construction and because of the funds and because  
19 they didn't get the necessary help, some of the  
20 construction have been stopped. I'm waiting for  
21 the help.

22           In summary, what I want to say is  
23 that the churches is an asset to the community.  
24 We need to help the churches do their job  
25 spiritually and for the communities. This is a

1  
2 place where the people come for change.  
3 Communities and families are restored. We serve a  
4 crucial part within our communities and we ask  
5 that we receive a fair share. We are not doing  
6 harm but good to the group and the communities of  
7 all ages, nationalities, faith. You don't have to  
8 be from my faith to come to my church and seek  
9 help.

10                   You have to help. We support this  
11 amendment to the--where is it--to the Robert  
12 Stafford Disaster Relief Emergency Fund. We  
13 support to be amended because the churches need to  
14 be helped. Thank you.

15                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
16 very much. Pastor Mobley?

17                   PASTOR CONNIS MOBLEY: Connis  
18 Mobley, Pastor of the United Community Church on  
19 the corner of West 27th and Mermaid in Coney  
20 Island. To Mr. Chairman and to the entire  
21 committee for this hearing and to all those  
22 present, we, I guess, come with a different twist  
23 today. That is because we were affected from  
24 Hurricane Irene of 2001. We were 264 days with no  
25 power, 241 days with no water. Could not get help

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from any location, FEMA, SBA, nothing.

So we had to use what capital funding that we were setting aside in renovation process of our building, because we are in a historic building that was built in 1943. So we wanted to make sure we were bringing the building up to code and so forth of that nature. We had to use all that we had in order to fight the bureaucracy to just get the help aid that we need.

Our insurance company dropped us after we had the fight with the city and Con Edison. And going back and forth to court five times for nine months, just to be able to say that we have experienced the loss of funds as well as what was on the part of both the city and Con Edison to correct what was wrong based upon their issue. Even though it's on our sidewalk, it's not our property.

Even in fighting in courts and so forth, wherein no lawyer would take the case because they said you can't win against the city and Con Edison. Those are big giants, you're not going to win, yet the judge sided in our favor. We were able then to get Con Edison to do what



1  
2 they were supposed to have done from the  
3 beginning, but yet now all funding was depleted.  
4 So therefore, the week of Mother's Day last year,  
5 we just received power, and then got hit with  
6 Sandy on top of all of this, with a complete  
7 wipeout.

8                   Now, I need to share that because  
9 I've been here already and I guess I'm the only  
10 person in this room that has gone through it  
11 twice, so I speak from experience and not from the  
12 head of just helping other people. We got to go a  
13 little further than FEMA. We even have to go in  
14 with the SBA.

15                   The reason for that being is  
16 because, and when you file with FEMA they share  
17 with you, of course, as we all are here knowing,  
18 they don't support or help financially with  
19 churches. But even through the SBA, the issue  
20 that I came up with and was challenged with and  
21 still am, and that is that they don't look  
22 favorably upon churches or houses of worship who  
23 are not connected with city funds, state funds,  
24 federal funding.

25                   I own the building. We own the

1  
2 building we're in, since 1984. The building is  
3 worth, according to the city, a little more than  
4 \$2 million. I'm sure if there was a real  
5 appraisal done, it's probably worth more than \$3  
6 million. But the key is that because of that, and  
7 we lost everything from this disaster, all of our  
8 records, everything, gone completely. Got a  
9 complete shell and I'm still gutting out as of  
10 today.

11 I have not been able to service the  
12 community, as I would like to. There's many  
13 people that want to come in and utilize our  
14 building but my concern is for the health and  
15 wellbeing of all. So I'm not going to allow  
16 individuals to come inside of my building knowing  
17 that health wise it may be unsafe. I don't want  
18 anyone to get sick on my watch.

19 So therefore, what I'm asking this  
20 committee to do is go a little further. Don't  
21 just hit at FEMA. All of our areas have to be  
22 looked at in a different kind of way from the  
23 city's perspective on how it views churches. The  
24 Department of Buildings came in, probably four or  
25 five visits that they've made to our property.

1  
2 Each time, a different person comes in and says,  
3 okay, I see your report from this but now I'm  
4 asking you to do this. All right, I see this but  
5 you need to do this now. You need to do this now.  
6 I keep sharing with each one of them, tell me  
7 everything that's going to be needed to be done so  
8 I'll know it all up front. There is an issue that  
9 I have wherein everyone comes from the same  
10 department but nobody knows exactly what's right  
11 and what to do. So there's a problem there.

12 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: This problem  
13 has been going on for years with the Buildings  
14 Department.

15 PASTOR CONNIS MOBLEY: Well it's a  
16 major problem.

17 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: It is.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: You should  
19 know, Pastor, that we just put in a bill to create  
20 an ombudsman, one person at each agency to resolve  
21 those agencies. You know, one of the groups that  
22 I served on, beyond everything else, was to try to  
23 reduce the problems on businesses. So we've  
24 created an ombudsman in every office. There's an  
25 individual at the Department of Buildings. You

1  
2 should talk to the--there's a community affairs at  
3 the Department of Buildings that do outreach, but  
4 they've create an ombudsman to deal with Sandy  
5 issues in every agency. So you should no longer  
6 have to deal with 45 different people coming at  
7 you. There's a regional director as well. So if  
8 you're having that kind of problem, you should let  
9 us know in the City Council so that we can make  
10 sure that you're no longer getting 45 different  
11 people coming in.

12                   One of the major things that we  
13 realized working with the Small Business Task  
14 Force, we try to remove regulations is that there  
15 is a problem where if you get one inspector that  
16 will totally overrule what the last inspector has  
17 done.

18                   PASTOR CONNIS MOBLEY: That's  
19 correct.

20                   COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I know  
21 that's a level of frustration that's beyond fair  
22 and it's just criminal to a large degree. So we  
23 put in to have an ombudsman in every agency that  
24 will direct and track to make sure that you're not  
25 getting that kind of problem again. So if you're

1

2 dealing with that then you need to let us know so  
3 that we can go and scream on them for you.

4

To all of the ministers or to  
5 anyone that's even listening, if you're having  
6 that kind of problem, please reach out to your  
7 local Council Member so that we can help you  
8 advocate for that--

9

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
10 He does reach out to me.

11

COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I know  
12 you're taking care of him, but this is to the  
13 larger audience as well. Domenic has been great  
14 and very responsive. The city now has an  
15 ombudsman program to try to eliminate that kind of  
16 problem. Even still, you know, that's one person  
17 in an agency. You know, Sandy has overwhelmed the  
18 agency, so we need to make sure that we're working  
19 with you hand in hand. So if there's any church,  
20 you know right the Rockaway doesn't have an  
21 elected official until the special election. I've  
22 put staff in the Rockaways. They can call my  
23 number. Set up already?

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Please

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reach out to our offices and let us help you with those types of problems.

PASTOR CONNIS MOBLEY: I greatly appreciate that, Council Member Comrie.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You want to sum up, Pastor because--

PASTOR CONNIS MOBLEY:  
[interposing] I'm going to sum up.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: --we have this room until 1:00 and I have a lot more people to testify.

PASTOR CONNIS MOBLEY: Very quickly, I'm going to summerate it right on up. I want to say thank you so very much for the efforts that you do in order to help in assisting all of us. Let me give you the real numbers of the real sustained damage to our building. It's \$122,200. We've already received five estimates for the rebuilding of it entirely and completely. The lowest estimate we have received as of last night is \$2.2 million in order to put our building back together again. So I don't perceive any kind of way, shape or form that I'm going to be able to literally be back in the house. I know I believe

1  
2 in miracles, but definitely not without some  
3 assistance and some help to alleviate the  
4 bureaucracy that comes along with all of these  
5 different agencies. So I'm glad to hear that.

6           Once again, Mr. Chairman, as I  
7 share with you as others, we as the clergy, we are  
8 holding you responsible and accountable for the  
9 affect and the effect of the decisions that you  
10 make that has an impact on us as a community.

11 Thank you for allowing us to share.

12           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Next.

13           RABBI YEHOShUA MERENFELD: Hi, my  
14 name is Rabbi Merenfeld. I am the Rabbi in  
15 Congregation, Yeshiva Tiferes Menachem in Seagate,  
16 New York on Beach 48th Street. Having heard  
17 everybody here from Brighton Beach and on Mermaid  
18 and Neptune, driving through the area since the  
19 storm, I see every day exactly the devastation.

20           I just wanted to point out, because  
21 everything that everybody has said really  
22 resonates with me and there's not much I can add,  
23 just one point. I hear the term again and again,  
24 house of worship, house of worship. I understand  
25 that we have to classify it in some way, but I

1  
2 just want to point out that one of the things that  
3 we do, and I'm sure everybody else does, is we are  
4 much more than a house of worship.

5           We reach out to our community  
6 members and when we need to, we're a house of  
7 laundry. Other times, we're a house for people to  
8 sleep over. We're a house where people can get a  
9 warm meal. Worship is just one tiny little thing  
10 of what we do. Honestly, worship can be done  
11 anywhere. We can a minion, as we call it, we can  
12 do that right here if you guys will let. But the  
13 people that come to us, they need much more than a  
14 house of worship.

15           We actually have students that come  
16 from all around the world, literally all around  
17 the world, from Russia and South Africa and  
18 Australia and Europe and Israel and all over  
19 America as well, to come and to stay and to dorm  
20 with us and to learn and to take part in the adult  
21 education that we provide.

22           Whereas some of our students were  
23 able to leave, obviously we had to set people up.  
24 We're only three houses away from the shore.  
25 Obviously, some people were able to go to their



1  
2 homes in the immediate area, but we had other  
3 students that were dorming with us. We don't  
4 charge a penny. All the money we get to help  
5 support our causes is from generous people outside  
6 of our community. They've been very generous  
7 after the storm but there's a limit to generosity.  
8 When you're talking about hundreds and hundreds of  
9 thousands of dollars just to fix what was  
10 destroyed, on top of our annual budget, it's just  
11 beyond what anybody that knows and cares about us  
12 is able to provide.

13           Some of our students were able to  
14 go home to New Jersey or even to California. When  
15 you have a student that we had to pay to bring  
16 over, from let's say, France or Ukraine to come  
17 and learn with us, we can't send them back. They  
18 don't have a place to stay. I mean,  
19 unfortunately, we had to invest thousands and  
20 thousands of dollars just to get the building up--  
21 when I say up to a minimum level for living--  
22 basically, we had to demolish all parts that could  
23 be demolished in order to get rid of any mold or  
24 any types of things that could...

25           So I don't want to go into to such

1  
2 a--to tell everybody the whole story over here,  
3 but basically the only thing that I have to say is  
4 that we have nowhere else to turn at this point.  
5 We have reached out to everybody that cares about  
6 us and the generosity has been amazing. We thank  
7 God every day for what people have been able to  
8 do.

9                   At this point, our backs are up  
10 against the wall, so I'm looking at the Council  
11 Members over here and everybody that has any type  
12 of influence or can accomplish anything, you are  
13 our last hope. If not for you, we have nowhere  
14 else to turn. We've used up all of our resources.  
15 I'm sure that everybody here is able to do  
16 something and will do something, so I want to  
17 thank you for everything that you can do.

18                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
19 very much. Call the next panel.

20                   TANISHA EDWARDS: Savone James,  
21 Reverend Malave, and Rubin Margules.

22                   [Pause]

23                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay.

24                   REV. SAVONE JAMES: Hi. My name is  
25 Savone James and I'm representing--

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]

You don't have to read this whole thing. You could sum up.

REV. SAVONE JAMES: No, I won't.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay.

REV. SAVONE JAMES: I absolutely will not. My name is Savone James and I'm representing the Coney Island Gospel Assembly Church in Coney Island, in please of Senior Pastor Constance Sanfilippo-Hulla, who was not able to be here today due to a scheduling issue.

As the Chairman has already mentioned, I'm not going to read this whole thing because there is a lot stipulated here. What I'd like to say is that, of course, I'm mirroring exactly what every other pastor and house of worship leader has said here today, how desperately this is needed in order for us to continue and move forward with the work that we have been called to do.

I know that I speak for Pastor Connie and the community of Coney Island when I say that even though we are the church, the spiritual aspect is the foundation, but what we do

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2 goes beyond that, as has been said and said again  
3 here in this meeting. The spiritual aspect of the  
4 church is the foundation, and from that springs  
5 forth everything else that we do in helping the  
6 community and in bringing people from the state  
7 that they're in into a better state.

8 I just want to simply say, because  
9 we've listed so many things that have come as a  
10 result of the Coney Island Gospel Assembly. The  
11 Coney Island Gospel Assembly was founded almost 56  
12 years ago by Sister Connie's dad, Jack A.  
13 Sanfilippo. I am, if you will allow me to say, or  
14 as it were, a testimony to what that church is  
15 able to do. I'm here. I'm a resident of Coney  
16 Island. I live in New York City housing. I'm  
17 here because the Coney Island Gospel Assembly was  
18 there all my life.

19 I came there as a 5-year-old little  
20 girl. I'm now 51, going on 52, thank God. But  
21 because of the Coney Island Gospel Assembly and  
22 because they have been such a constant and a  
23 mainstay in the community, not matter what was  
24 going on, the Coney Island Gospel Assembly has  
25 been there.

1  
2 I just want to leave you with this,  
3 because as I said, everybody has been mirroring  
4 and basically saying the same thing that's written  
5 on this paper. We need help. The church that I  
6 belong to, the Coney Island Gospel Assembly, is  
7 still there. Actually, the sanctuary is still  
8 there, because we are a raised building. Our  
9 building is raised up, and Mr. Recchia, you know  
10 that because you visited.

11 Our building is still there and the  
12 water didn't come into the sanctuary but it  
13 totally demolished our basement, which is where  
14 the offices were and where we held our youth  
15 meetings and everything else that we do, where we  
16 hold repasses and where people come to have all  
17 types of meetings. We had a truancy program  
18 there. We had the Brooklyn task force there.  
19 There were so many things that's listed here.  
20 There's 50 some odd things that listed here that  
21 we've been able top do as an outreach to the  
22 community of Coney Island.

23 But we're there, as I said, because  
24 the building is raised. So the water came  
25 literally to the top step and did not enter into

1  
2 the sanctuary, otherwise we would not be there.  
3 We were, a few days after Hurricane Sandy,  
4 ministering to people out of the sanctuary, in the  
5 dark, with makeshift lighting. Right now, we have  
6 no electricity. We have generators. We have  
7 absolutely no heating system. We are doing what  
8 we can, as we are able to do so, with limited  
9 resources. But God has been so good.

10 I want to end by saying, and I  
11 thank you so much for listening to me today. I  
12 thank God for Sister Connie. I thank God for her  
13 and her faithfulness to the Coney Island Gospel  
14 Assembly. I thank God for her mom and dad, who  
15 have now passed on into eternity. But I want to  
16 just leave this and say this, as a result of being  
17 a house of worship, we're here today because we  
18 need help. There is no doubt about that. The  
19 church has sustained over \$1.5 million in damages.  
20 It's going to take that and more to really get it  
21 back to its full potential.

22 I want to just leave it by making  
23 this very real statement that actually comes out  
24 of a passage of scripture in the Bible. Is there  
25 not a cause? Is there not a cause? Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
3 very much.

4 RUBIN MARGULES: My name is Rubin  
5 Margules. I am the president of the Manhattan  
6 Beach Jewish Center in Brooklyn, Manhattan Beach  
7 Brooklyn.

8 I'd like to just say a few words  
9 that I've prepared. Europeans came to America to  
10 flee religious persecution. That unrest fueled  
11 the desire of our founding fathers to establish  
12 the organization of a country in which the  
13 separation of church and state and the freedom to  
14 worship was granted in the First Amendment, which  
15 is called the Establishment Clause. Its states,  
16 Congress shall make no law respecting the  
17 establishment of religion or prohibiting the free  
18 exercise thereof.

19 Given today's economic reality, our  
20 inability as faith-based groups to be treated as a  
21 part of the community and receive the economic  
22 assistance we need is indirectly affecting our  
23 First Amendment right to exercise our religion.  
24 We are a secular nation, and for that we are very  
25 grateful. But I do believe the purpose of the

1  
2 First Amendment was not to make it harder to  
3 facilitate observance by the faithful but that all  
4 faiths should be able to observe their religions  
5 as they see fit.

6 In spite of being a secular  
7 country, our founding fathers gave us a strong  
8 religious heritage that is sometimes overlooked.  
9 For example, "The Star Spangled Banner" contains  
10 the phrase, "praise the power that has made and  
11 preserved us a nation." Power is a capital P. It  
12 concludes, "In God we trust." "God Bless America"  
13 is sometimes called our second national anthem.  
14 It was written in 1918, by a Jewish immigrant  
15 Irving Berlin. In God we trust is printed on our  
16 currency. The Pledge of Allegiance, "One nation  
17 under God." The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia  
18 proclaimed liberty throughout the land and to all  
19 the inhabitants thereof. It comes from the Bible,  
20 from the Torah, Leviticus.

21 Synagogues and churches provide  
22 invaluable services to the community every bit as  
23 important as private not-for-profit facilities.  
24 We definitely deserve to be given the support  
25 provided to every other not-for-profit



1  
2 organization. When I saw the hearing notice and  
3 the issue was whether or not to allow aid to be  
4 given to houses of worship, I thought of the  
5 famous quote in the "Merchant of Venice." "If I  
6 can cut, do I not bleed?"

7 In our center, we have asked the  
8 school programs and tutoring open to all people  
9 regardless of their religion. Our senior center  
10 is open to the entire community. Eighty percent  
11 of the people who visit our center are not there  
12 for religious purposes and come from all  
13 denominations and walks of life. Yet, we are not  
14 asking for programming support, but to be treated  
15 fairly. We are not second-class citizens.

16 The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center  
17 provides to the community we serve through our  
18 educational programs and senior programs. Our  
19 Yeshiva Day School provides an education for over  
20 200 young people. Most importantly, we give to  
21 all a sense of hope.

22 Today, an institution such as ours  
23 that has grown to nearly 100 square feet of space  
24 in its main synagogue and adjacent six-story  
25 building, school building, cannot rely on our

1  
2 membership to make us whole again after such a  
3 devastating destruction because just as we are  
4 hurting, so are they. Most of the families in our  
5 community had six to eight feet of water in their  
6 homes. They are also, as you know, dealing with  
7 insurance companies, dredging up a paragraph or  
8 two never before seen as to why our losses are not  
9 covered. It is difficult to ask them for help  
10 when they need it themselves.

11           As an institution, we have not  
12 forgotten them and have been able to also assist  
13 them and direct to some of the "get help" seminars  
14 that were held. We refer congregants and  
15 community people, without distinction, to sources  
16 of assistance and provide counseling for those who  
17 seek it.

18           The night of the storm, we opened  
19 our doors on our second floor to accommodate  
20 people who needed shelter and did not evacuate.  
21 Over a dozen people took advantage. Like many  
22 not-for-profits, we have been in the community for  
23 many years and know our people and their needs.

24           Our own needs as a congregation are  
25 staggering. Over \$200,000 for temporary electric

1  
2 work alone, so our kids could come back to school,  
3 so our seniors can return to their friends, enjoy  
4 a hot meal and social activities, so important to  
5 their wellbeing. To get our boiler burner  
6 working--not replaced, just to work--has given us  
7 another invoice of \$68,000.

8           The remediation and demolition of  
9 our catering hall, that provided us with income to  
10 meet our operating budget and is used by the  
11 school as an auditorium, was totally devastated.  
12 The remediation and demolition cost us an  
13 additional \$100,000. Estimates that we have  
14 received indicate that to repair and refurbish can  
15 cost upward of another \$500,000 to \$1 million. It  
16 is money we do not have and only a fraction can be  
17 raised through donations.

18           We service pre-k to our oldest  
19 seniors. In today's world--

20           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
21 All right, I don't mean to interrupt you. Could  
22 you sum up please?

23           RUBIN MARGULES: Yes.

24           CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We're running  
25 out of time.

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RUBIN MARGULES: Just 30 seconds.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You have to  
sum up.

RUBIN MARGULES: In today's world,  
we cannot have an old-fashioned barn raising, as  
in the past, when a community came together to cut  
the lumber, raise the roof and rebuild that which  
was destroyed. Today's economics are obviously  
totally different and our needs should be met. We  
need help for which we have never asked for  
before. Today, we are asking for help in order  
for us to continue to give help. We are part of  
the community and we recognize as such.

The extraordinary constellation of  
events that caused the damage from Hurricane Sandy  
requires an extraordinary response and outreach.  
It requires that the government accommodate all  
segments of the community, regardless of  
denomination. The test should be whether or not--

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
Okay, I don't mean to cut you off--

RUBIN MARGULES: --we are serving  
the needs of our community.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: thank you

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very much.

RUBIN MARGULES: It's the last sentence. The test should be are we serving the needs of our community, regardless of affiliation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Next please. You have to, if I tell you to sum up, you have to sum up immediately. It's not fair to everybody else that's been waiting here. You know, we're under a time limit. I'm trying to be nice. I'm not going on a clock. When I say sum up, it means you have to sum up. You cannot disrespect this City Council and come into our house and disrespect me as the chairman of this committee. It will not be tolerated. Thank you. Next please.

REV. EDWIN MALAVE: Yes. My name is Edwin Malave. I am Pastor of the New Church International in Coney Island. Our location is 2002 Neptune Avenue and 20th Street. I would like to thank the chairman and members of the committee for giving us the opportunity to come before you and hear our cause.

Councilman Cabrera is not present

1

2 at this moment, but I would also like to give  
3 thanks to him because several of the trucks that  
4 he sent to Coney Island actually ended up at New  
5 Church International, and that was a wonderful  
6 thing.

7

I am, in the words of Councilman  
8 Cabrera, I am the pastor that lost the home. My  
9 home is 70 percent destroyed. I have four units  
10 and three of the units are unlivable. I am a  
11 retired government worker. I am living on a fixed  
12 income and the rent that we received from the  
13 place that we have actually supplements my income.  
14 We lost that the moment that Sandy hit Coney  
15 Island. Today, as a matter of fact, one of those  
16 residents has found another place to live. She  
17 cannot come back because we haven't been able to  
18 repair this.

19

Now, that said, we have our church  
20 was completely--3,000 square feet--was completely  
21 under six feet of water. Someone asked me  
22 recently how was the church being sustained before  
23 Sandy, and we have a number of the congregants  
24 that were helping us with donations and tithing.  
25 We were also ready to open a bookstore that was

1  
2 supposed to open the Saturday after Thanksgiving,  
3 in order to support the church. All that went out  
4 under six feet of water. That bookstore is no  
5 longer there and the church lost all the  
6 infrastructure.

7           As I look at this place right here,  
8 I could see that it is good for the chairs to be  
9 here, everyone to sit at the microphones and  
10 everything is all together with the purpose of  
11 getting to the point across that we're trying to  
12 do here. Our churches cannot do that any longer.  
13 My church lost all the chairs, microphones,  
14 everything that created the infrastructure to help  
15 the people was lost.

16           What we did instead is that from  
17 the third day, from the very third day after the  
18 storm, we became not a house of worship but a  
19 relief center. Right now, today as a matter of  
20 fact, we're open Thursday, Friday and Saturdays,  
21 providing relief to the community. We are at this  
22 moment, believe it or not, providing approximately  
23 1,000 boxes of food every weekend to the  
24 community. We are being supported by City  
25 Harvest, by the New York Bank, food bank, and we

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are supported by the River Fund.

We are also providing in our church building, in our facilities, we have provided workshops with FEMA. Two weekends ago, they actually used our facilities to reach out to the residents of Coney Island. They are, right now, preparing to do the same thing. This Saturday, this coming Saturday, the Mayor's Office reached out to us to actually come and provide and use our facility with the purpose of reaching out to the community with a new initiative to connect the resources with the community.

So all this is happening at what we call a house of worship that all the walls are destroyed that the floors is gone, that all the infrastructure is lost and that we are being told that we cannot receive the funding and benefits from our government.

I will sum up by saying this. Sandy heavily impacted Coney Island in a very, very negative way, but the houses of worship of Coney Island have heavily impacted Coney Island in a very positive way. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you



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very much. I want to thank you all for coming to testify today. Call the next panel please.

TANISHA EDWARDS: Chaim Leibtag, Reverend Sleet, Reverend Gray, Reverend Barm.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Who would like to go first?

CHAIM LEIBTAG: Is it now afternoon? It's good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Good afternoon.

CHAIM LEIBTAG: While much of what I have to say has already been said, I believe it is imperative-

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Would you state your name for the record?

CHAIM LEIBTAG: Oh, I'll get to that in one moment. It is imperative that FEMA and government hear loud and clear the importance of amending the Stafford Law. They must know that we are angry. We are frustrated and we are tired of the inability of government to act.

My name is Chaim Leibtag. I am the president of congregation at Knesoth Israel in Far

1  
2 Rockaway, a proud homeowner of over 30 years in  
3 the Rockaways, and a survivor of Superstorm Sandy.  
4 I had the privilege to lead my synagogue during  
5 the critical weeks following the storm, as we  
6 provided food, shelter, electrical power strips  
7 and wi-fi, gasoline and critical information to  
8 those impacted.

9                   We opened our synagogue to FEMA,  
10 the Governor's Office, and other government  
11 agencies to set up information tables. We took  
12 two classrooms and gave them to a local  
13 pediatrician, who still today services his  
14 patients in our synagogue. Other rooms were set  
15 up as a clothing distribution center and a food  
16 pantry. For three weeks, we housed second and  
17 third grades of the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach.  
18 We ran youth activities, including a magician,  
19 arts and crafts, and a music concert for children.

20                   Our volunteers walked and drove the  
21 darkened streets at night as an adjunct to the  
22 local 101. Our volunteers drove to Connecticut to  
23 buy batteries and flashlights that we distributed  
24 free of charge, and we drove the neighborhood  
25 offering our assistance to the churches and

1  
2 community centers who were not as well organized  
3 as we were. One night, we loaded over 1,500  
4 pallets of food to the Baptist Church round the  
5 corner and they loved the potato kugel.

6 In my professional life, I serve as  
7 the chief operating office of the National Council  
8 of Young Israel, the parent body of over 150  
9 synagogues in the United States. Our organization  
10 helped to raise critical funds and provide  
11 organizational relief for the 13 synagogues in our  
12 network that were most heavily impacted. Those go  
13 all the way down the shore, from Oceanside, Long  
14 Beach, Woodmere, et cetera, to Canarsie, as far as  
15 Margate, New Jersey. We did this as our own  
16 offices, our own offices in Lower Manhattan were  
17 shuttered for over two months.

18 Our synagogues suffered significant  
19 damage, well over \$3 million, yet we're--as we  
20 have heard before--the centers and communities for  
21 disaster relief. I also want to echo what one of  
22 the ministers said before. We have been preparing  
23 our communities for what lays ahead. There are  
24 going to be many, many problems going forward and  
25 our synagogues are being trained for that today.

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2                   Where would we be today without our  
3 religious institutions? While I commend the city  
4 and your work for their incredible work, can you  
5 imagine the city trying to set up and feed and  
6 cloth the myriad of people, at the same time  
7 giving them power strips to power their cell  
8 phones?

9                   At no time did we ever ask the  
10 religious affiliation of the thousands who came  
11 through our doors. At no time did we ever deny  
12 anyone food and shelter. At no time did we ever  
13 consider that we would be repaid for the tireless  
14 work we did. At no time did we expect the  
15 government to come and bail us out. At no time  
16 did we ever consider that, because our founding  
17 fathers in their infinite wisdom created a  
18 separation between church and state, that we would  
19 be abandoned by our government.

20                   Synagogues, mosques and churches  
21 are the centers of their communities. They become  
22 that way because that is the nature of what they  
23 are. Even the unaffiliated and non-believers come  
24 to a house of worship in difficult times because  
25 they know deep inside that this is the place that

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they will receive help.

Mr. Chairman, our houses of worship are built with private dollars. These private dollars have been decimated by the storm. The three-month harangue with FEMA, the state and federal government and the insurance cartels have placed an unacceptable burden on those private dollars. So, do our houses remain unfinished or do our houses of worship lay barren? Government is forcing us to make choices that are totally unnecessary and morally unacceptable.

The founding fathers made a distinction between church and state so that government of the people and by the people would endure in a country where religion would not be forced upon anyone. They did not make the distinction so that the government of the people and by the people would abandon their citizens in their greatest hour of need in the one central house that all who choose can call home.

Our organization and my synagogue implore you to find a way to help us across this fictitious boundary so that the institutions of religion can rebuild. Americans and New Yorkers

1  
2 especially have always found that way. We urge  
3 you to introduce and pass legislation that would  
4 amend the Robert Stafford Disaster Relief and  
5 Emergency Assistance Act to allow aid to be given  
6 to houses of worship affected by the hurricane, on  
7 terms similar to other eligible private  
8 nonprofits.

9                   We stand with you and ask to join  
10 you to establish a pluralistic community that  
11 would regulate this form of disbursement, not only  
12 for our religious--I'm sorry--fund us not for our  
13 religious practice, but fund us for our practice  
14 of humanity. "In God we trust" should not be left  
15 just as a slogan on the dollar bill, it should be  
16 the mantra that we sing and the banner that we  
17 raise so that government can help its religious  
18 communities grow to higher and greater levels of  
19 service. Thank you very much.

20                   CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you. I  
21 would ask before you testify to state your name  
22 first, because this gets transcribed by a  
23 stenographer and they always complain that we  
24 don't know who speaks first, you know. We've been  
25 joined by Council Member Mealy. Okay, next?

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REV. DUANE SLEET: Good afternoon.  
My name is Pastor Duane Sleet, the pastor of First Baptist Church. To the Honorable Councilman Recchia and all the other councilpersons who are present today, I represent the First Baptist Church of Far Rockaway, Queens.

We lost our entire fellowship hall, for which we house our soup kitchen and our food pantry at this point. We lost our electrical system and our boiler system. We lost everything because of the storm. The cost for this work to be put back together is probably around \$200,000 of which \$50,000 was received from insurance, which was the cap for our policy.

We have worked and we have served diligently to work and do the work that needs to be done. I'm summarizing where we are. We are just trying to have our voice heard in Far Rockaway, the churches, so that you understand that our facility is not only a house of worship. It's a place where the community gathers, a place where people belong when they have no place to hold meetings and fundraisers, functions, they come to us free of charge and we open our doors

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willingly.

We are asking that this Council would continue to pass this resolution and work towards the resolution of these issues. We stand in agreement, and affirmation of what is going on and we thank you for these brief moments here today.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you very much. I just want everyone to know, if it was up to the City Council, we would pass this immediately. We have to go to Washington and that's why we're trying to pass this resolution and bring attention to this. You know, really, the newspapers, they don't write about this. They don't write about the houses of worship, that they're under funded and what's going on is not right.

REV. DUANE SLEET: Mr. Chairman and to the Council Members, I'm Pastor Evan Gray, pastor of the Macedonia Baptist Church in Far Rockaway, Queens.

As my colleague and my friend Dr. Sleet has already stated, the churches have provided assistance to the communities. The



1

2 churches have been relied upon, even when in this  
3 economic environment of the budget cuts and things  
4 of that nature, it's the church that provides that  
5 bridge, that gap to help those who are desperately  
6 in need.

7

Our church was hit badly, over  
8 \$250,000 worth of damage. The church has been  
9 there for the community by providing services  
10 within the community such as truancy program and  
11 the NAACP meeting as well as an AA program and  
12 youth services to our community.

13

The Rockaways, which has been  
14 known--and you may not want to publicly say it,  
15 but we feel it--has been the forgotten place in  
16 the City of New York. So we were already under  
17 funded and under programmed and things of that  
18 nature. At this present time, I thank Councilman  
19 Comrie for providing staff to the Rockaways  
20 because we don't have a Councilperson at this  
21 present moment. So we're kind of our there. So  
22 we need help. The churches need help.

23

The church has been in the  
24 forefront from the very beginning of the storm.  
25 We have done, and the synagogues, the mosques, we

1  
2 have been there to help our community. It didn't  
3 matter what religious affiliation, it didn't  
4 matter what gender. It didn't matter your sexual  
5 preference. It didn't matter any of those. It  
6 didn't matter if you were Republican or Democrat,  
7 Independent or Tea Party, it didn't matter. We  
8 provided help. It is sad that our government has  
9 turned their backs on those who were there at the  
10 very beginning.

11 We encourage you to do all that you  
12 can do, and we stand beside you.

13 REV. WILLIAM BARM: Thank you for  
14 the opportunity to speak. I'm Reverend William  
15 Baum. I'm pastor of St. Barnabas Lutheran Church  
16 in Howard Beach. I'll try not to be repetitive.

17 I'd like to focus on one specific  
18 point here--

19 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]  
20 Do we have written testimony prepared, a copy?

21 REV. WILLIAM BARM: I think the  
22 sergeant-at-arms has it. I handed it in a little  
23 bit late, so maybe it didn't come up to you.

24 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: That's all  
25 right.

1  
2 REV. WILLIAM BARM: Shall I proceed  
3 before you receive it?

4 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: That's all  
5 right. I like to have it in front of me, so we  
6 could...

7 REV. WILLIAM BARM: I want to focus  
8 on one particular specific point and that is the  
9 distinction between a congregation's use of a  
10 church building and the wider community's use of  
11 that same building.

12 Since Superstorm Sandy, our  
13 congregation continues to gather for church  
14 services as we always have. Our upstairs worship  
15 space was not damaged in the storm. However, the  
16 community hall in our church basement was  
17 destroyed. The congregation uses this large hall  
18 one hour a week for Sunday school classes and the  
19 remaining 167 hours a week is given over to  
20 community programs.

21 When functioning, the St. Barnabas  
22 Church community hall provides 6,000 square feet  
23 of safe, clean and secure space, with hundreds of  
24 chairs and tables, a large equipped kitchen, fully  
25 functioning stage and sound system, a piano and

1  
2 even a caretaker. With the exception of that  
3 wonderful caretaker, everything is gone and  
4 destroyed by the storm surge that we have not  
5 experienced anything like it in 90 years in our  
6 location.

7 Most important to us to note is the  
8 St. Barnabas community hall is not for rent.  
9 There is no fee charged for its use. It is made  
10 freely available to organizations and programs  
11 serving the community. I'll just name a few for  
12 the sake of brevity. There are five--not three,  
13 not four, but five Girl Scout troops that meet  
14 there. There is a Boy Scout troop, Cub Scout  
15 pack, AA group, civic associations, blood drives,  
16 food pantry and other Red Cross programs, election  
17 debates for sponsored--being sponsored by local  
18 newspapers, public meetings hosted by local  
19 elected officials, various programs for seniors  
20 and youth. In all, a few thousand people are  
21 directly served.

22 The congregation is made up of  
23 families from Howard Beach, Hamilton Beach, Broad  
24 Channel and Breezy Point. Although FEMA and  
25 various insurers have provided some relief for the

1  
2 average family, the uncovered losses far exceed  
3 their financial capacity. Therefore, the very  
4 people that would normally pull together to  
5 support a building restoration campaign by giving  
6 generously of their resources, are unable to do  
7 so. Their own resources have been seriously  
8 diminished by tens of thousands of dollars.

9           So, the net result of all of this  
10 is that although the congregation still gathers in  
11 its worship space upstairs, the community has lost  
12 all of the programming and meeting space for  
13 organizations which would normally gather  
14 downstairs in the destroyed community hall.

15           The congregation is dedicated to  
16 serving God and neighbor. From our perspective,  
17 all of what we offer freely to the community is  
18 part of our ministry. That is our mission.  
19 However, viewed from the perspective of the  
20 community, there is nothing particularly religious  
21 about the use of the community hall. There is no  
22 proselytizing and no one is excluded based on  
23 religion or anything else.

24           The St. Barnabas community hall is  
25 located in the church, but in every real sense, it

1  
2 belongs to the community. Its loss has torn a  
3 gaping hole in the social fabric of our  
4 neighborhood. Assistance from FEMA in restoring  
5 this space would be profoundly beneficial to the  
6 community. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
8 very much. Do any members have any questions? I  
9 want to thank you all for coming down today. I  
10 just want to make sure that everybody--I'm sure  
11 you did it already--but everybody applied to FEMA.  
12 You know, filled out applications. You have to  
13 apply because if something breaks loose, they're  
14 going to say all right, the deadline is the end of  
15 February. So make sure everybody applies and gets  
16 their applications in.

17 Just for another thing is that if  
18 FEMA denies you, right, they say you should apply  
19 for a loan. And you say I'm not applying for a  
20 loan, I don't want to fill out the paperwork, I  
21 don't want to put the burden on my congregation,  
22 we can't afford it. Fill out the paperwork  
23 because you could always deny the loan. What I'm  
24 afraid of is that this money might become  
25 available in months down the road and they're

1  
2 going to say, okay, we'll go through all the  
3 applications that were denied and that were given  
4 a loan, that either took a loan or were denied a  
5 loan, and those who never put in the paperwork are  
6 going to be left out in the cold. So we should  
7 pass that out to the faith-based community. I  
8 should have made that announcement at the  
9 beginning of the hearing. I think that's very,  
10 very important that even if you are not going to  
11 take the loan, still put in the paperwork. Okay?  
12 Thank you very much.

13 TANISHA EDWARDS: Adam LeBron,  
14 Dahlia Goldenberg, Maggie LeBron, Reverend Devlin,  
15 and Sarah Felsenthal from Met Council.

16 [Pause]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Has anyone  
18 else put in? Have we missed anyone? Okay, this  
19 will be the last panel then. Why don't we start  
20 from the left? If everyone handed in their  
21 paperwork, begin and identify yourself and move  
22 down.

23 MAGDALENA LEBRON: God bless you  
24 all. My name is Magdalena LeBron. I'm with  
25 Reaching Out Ministries, working under the

1  
2 umbrella of IPG Cristo Viene [phonetic] in Coney  
3 Island. I want to just thank you for standing up  
4 for the houses of worship, because the houses of  
5 worship are always put to the side but they're  
6 always the ones that are in the forefront. I  
7 wrote out a statement, so I'm going to let my  
8 husband Adam LeBron, take it from here.

9 ADAM LEBRON: Good morning to the  
10 Councilman. I wanted to express my thanks to  
11 Diana Reyna. We've worked on several projects  
12 before, in helping in the community, towards a  
13 school. Pastor, God bless you this morning.

14 I just want to thank you for giving  
15 us the opportunity to be able to express our  
16 needs. When we say, I believe that we are all in  
17 the same boat where we need help at this point. I  
18 just want to read really quickly. I know I've got  
19 five minutes, right. Okay.

20 Reaching Out Ministries  
21 Incorporated is an outreach ministry, which was  
22 founded in 2001. It is a faith-based  
23 organization, holistically, which is currently  
24 affiliated with the Iglesia Pentecostal De  
25 Jesucristo Cristo Viene, that's the Pentecostal



1  
2 Church of Jesus Christ, Christ is coming and in  
3 the same facility. We're in the same facility.

4 In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, the  
5 facility was totally destroyed. During the first  
6 days, it was difficult to register and to think of  
7 what would be next. However, as the days passed  
8 by, the church was open to the community and was a  
9 beacon of light. What houses of worship are  
10 called to be, a beacon of light.

#### 11 Reaching Out Ministries

12 Incorporated does outreach such as feed the  
13 homeless, provide immediate needs such as taking  
14 food to families in need, et cetera. In its  
15 recent years, Reaching Out Ministries Incorporated  
16 has become a ministry which utilizes music to  
17 preach the gospel.

18 During the summer of 2012, we had a  
19 salsa concert on the boardwalk of Coney Island.  
20 If you was out there in your bathing suit, then  
21 you was moving your body to the beat. Amen. In  
22 which several musical bands brought music to the  
23 community in Coney Island, with a positive  
24 message, proclaiming the word of God. We have  
25 taught music, primarily guitar, to several

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students and look forward to beginning this work once again.

It was exciting to see that although the facility was closed, IPG Cristo Viene and Reaching Out Ministries locked arms, which is something that I would like for our city, our state to recognize, to come together, to lock arms with us so that we can continue this wonderful work that we do in our community. We are able to bring a sense of security and hope to all those that had none.

During the Thanksgiving holiday, Reaching Out Ministries Incorporated fed over 300 homeless people in which we bring live music, clothing and a word of hope and encouragement. We provide resources to shelters, to rehabilitation programs, anything that would help them get off the streets and back into society.

We had planned an outreach for Thanksgiving of 2012 by Elmhurst Hospital in Queens. When Hurricane Sandy hit, the outreach was done in Coney Island. We were able to bring Thanksgiving and Christmas cheer to the community despite the fact that it had been--that the first

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floor had been destroyed.

It has been such a pleasure working with Iglesia Pentecostal de Jesucristo Cristo Viene. The fact is that the facility must be restored. Programs need to be restored. Families need to be reached and the community is depending on us and you, the deciding committee. Time is passing by fast. Families are still displaced. My family being one of them. People need a place to come and find peace, joy, serenity and emotional support. This is the time where families are dealing with the emotion of all that had happened and we need to give them a shoulder to cry on, a place of restoration and a place that they can run to. Our facility needs to be open and whole so that they can do that.

Houses of worship play a vital role in our communities. We bring hope where there is no hope and peace where there is no peace. Houses of worship is where people run to in desperation during 9/11, looking for hope, looking for something they knew they could not find elsewhere. Houses of worship is where our children learn about unity, values, as a place of safety. Houses

1  
2 of worship is where our youth can come to find  
3 positive influences and get a word of edification.  
4 Houses of worship is where we can find unity,  
5 people in one accord, working together towards one  
6 goal.

#### 7 Reaching Out Ministries

8 Incorporated has always worked fervently with the  
9 youth. In past years, we had access to a  
10 community center. As it stands now, Coney Island  
11 has no youth centers available for use. They have  
12 all been flooded out. The youth of today need to  
13 be in a place of security, a place where they are  
14 not judged but taught, loved, led and understood.

15 We endeavor to get up, rebuild and  
16 begin to reach out to our communities' youth and  
17 bring them to a place where they can become young  
18 men and women that have fear of the Lord and that  
19 walk in the right path. Youth that do not end up  
20 behind bars, that do not end up on drugs, that do  
21 not end up being parents at a young age, that will  
22 be respected members of society and the pride of  
23 our community.

24 To sum it up, because I know I'm  
25 running out of time.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You're lucky  
3 you're the last one.

4 ADAM LEBRON: Reaching Out  
5 Ministries Incorporated looks forward to the  
6 future, to the greater things yet to come, to a  
7 better facility where we can have a youth program  
8 and a music program that will change and transform  
9 lives. We thank you for considering the houses of  
10 worship during this difficult time. We thank you  
11 for giving us the opportunity to rebuild stronger  
12 than before and to be able to move forward in this  
13 new year, knowing that the country we love so  
14 dearly has made provision for us. God bless all  
15 of you and God bless America.

16 REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: Good  
17 afternoon. My name is Pastor Bill Devlin, and I  
18 am the co-chair of the Right to Worship. I think  
19 I've also been called one of the chief  
20 troublemakers in New York City. So I hope that's  
21 a good thing. I'm here also affiliated with  
22 Infinity Church--thank you, Councilman--Infinity  
23 Church in the Bronx.

24 Whenever I testify before an august  
25 body like this, I always do the three B's. Be

1  
2 brief, be blunt and be gone. So I will do that  
3 today. I'd like to quote Councilman Vallone, this  
4 is pretty simple. I'd like to also quote you, Mr.  
5 Chairman, OMG, oh my god.

6 We're here today, and by the way,  
7 Right to Worship is advocating for the allowance  
8 of houses of worship to worship in public  
9 education buildings and we hope that that  
10 resolution passes and that Speaker Quinn votes it  
11 out and we hope that that moves forward.

12 We're not moneygrubbers here. We  
13 depend upon God for our sustenance. So we do not  
14 have that dreaded disease myfundsarelow. If  
15 you've ever heard of that, if you say it real  
16 slow, "my funds are low." All we're asking for is  
17 equity on this.

18 On the day that Sandy hit, the  
19 church where I attend now, Infinity Church, was  
20 there on day one and they're still there. The  
21 church not affected but they wanted to serve. In  
22 fact, they were there before--as other people have  
23 testified--before FEMA, before the Red Cross, et  
24 cetera.

25 In fact, I feel that it's somewhat

1  
2 oxymoronic when you went to Far Rockaway, where  
3 was the FEMA headquarters set up? In a church. I  
4 mean that's like jumbo shrimp. It's unbelievable  
5 that FEMA, which is denying funding for houses of  
6 worship would yet go to the Church of the Nazarene  
7 in Far Rockaway and say we want to set up shop.  
8 In this church, they cleared out their  
9 congregation and they said you can have it.

10 I often think that God looks down  
11 at FEMA and government and says "Y'all about to  
12 make me lose my mind, up in here, up in here."

13 [Laughter]

14 REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: Finally, I  
15 just want to conclude. I just quoted my favorite  
16 theologian. So I just want to conclude with  
17 probably the case, the lawsuit of American atheist  
18 versus the city of Detroit in 2009. I consulted  
19 our legal team at the Right to Worship which I co-  
20 chair, and they said that this is the case that  
21 FEMA should look at. When the City of Detroit was  
22 applying for federal funding to redo the entire  
23 façade of the city for the Super Bowl, if you  
24 remember this, the U.S. Appellate Court for the  
25 Sixth District ruled against the American Atheist

1  
2 and said, yes, federal funding can go toward  
3 three--I think there was a Methodist Church, a  
4 Lutheran Church and a non-denominational church--  
5 federal funding can go towards this.

6 So I just want to testify in  
7 support of the resolution. Councilmen and  
8 Councilwomen, thank you so much for just standing  
9 with the institutions in your neighborhoods that  
10 are always standing in favor of you. Let me close  
11 by saying we pray for you regularly. We have a  
12 team of pastors that prays for each one of you by  
13 name. So thank you very much and God bless you  
14 and keep God first. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you  
16 very much. Before you get up.

17 REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: Sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Council  
19 Member Vallone has a question.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: What was  
21 the name of the case? Do you know offhand?

22 REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: Yeah, the  
23 case is American Atheist v. City of Detroit. I  
24 can email you the actual citation.

25 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yeah, the



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citation--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE:

[interposing] Email it to me and also to Domenic.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yeah, we'd like a copy of that.

REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: It's a great case, 32 pages.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I agree with you that our First Amendment has been turned on its head. Luckily, neither of us are insane in the membrane yet, so that's good.

REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: Yes.

[Laughter]

REV. WILLIAM DEVLIN: Up in here, up in here.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: All right, Council Member Cabrera.


COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I just want to thank everyone who is here today. Also, I just want to make a public that I hope next time we have a reso or a bill related to religion that the cameras will actually be on. We had the same situation when we had the right to worship hearings. There were no cameras, so whatever is

1  
2 spoken about here was not televised, even though  
3 we have a bill that requires that, legislation  
4 that was passed to require that. I want to thank  
5 all the pastors. Thank you and all the rabbis and  
6 imams that came here today.

7 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: I want to  
8 thank everyone. If anyone has any problems or  
9 needs any help, the City Council under the  
10 leadership of Speaker Christine Quinn is here to  
11 work with all the houses of worship. We are  
12 moving forward trying to help them all and what  
13 the issues are. I want to thank you all for  
14 coming. This meeting is now adjourned.

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 

Date March 4, 2013