

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

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February 13, 2013

Start: 1:17 p.m.

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway
Committee Room, 16th Floor

B E F O R E:
ROSIE MENDEZ
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Maria del Carmen Arroyo
Margaret Chin
Sara M. Gonzalez
Daniel J. Halloran
Melissa Mark-Viverito
Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.
James G. Van Bramer

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

John Rhea
Chairman
New York City Housing Authority

Cecil House
General Manager
New York City Housing Authority

Carlos Laboy-Diaz
Executive Vice President for Operations
New York City Housing Authority

Natalie Rivers
Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative
Officer
New York City Housing Authority

Deidra Gilliard
Vice President for Community Operations
New York City Housing Authority

Judith Goldiner
Legal Aid Society

Kirby Desmarais
Red Hook Volunteers

Nancy Ortiz

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. We're
3 ready. Sergeant?

4 MALE VOICE: Carlos.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Good
7 afternoon, this hearing has come to order.
8 Welcome everyone, I am Councilwoman Rosie Mendez
9 and I chair the Committee on Public Housing.
10 Today's hearing is a continuation of our January
11 17th hearing that was held to evaluate the New
12 York City Housing Authority's preparation and
13 response to Superstorm Sandy. However, at that
14 time, the New York City Council had not received a
15 copy of NYCHA's hurricane emergency plan--a plan
16 that the administration and NYCHA had not released
17 to us until two weeks ago. The focus of today's
18 hearing will be NYCHA's hurricane emergency plan.
19 After reviewing the plan, the committee has a
20 number of concerns which we hope to address today.
21 I will highlight a few now.

22 First, NYCHA has had a hurricane
23 emergency plan since 1964, but it has only updated
24 that plan five times in nearly 50 years. NYCHA
25 previously revised its plan on September 5th,

1
2 2005, after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans.
3 And NYCHA revised its plan on October 25th, 2012,
4 four days prior to Superstorm Sandy striking New
5 York City.

6 The revision was substantial. It
7 took the plan from 10 pages to 39 pages and it
8 added several new procedures. Four days is
9 obviously not enough time to implement a whole new
10 plan. NYCHA has explained, and I will expect we
11 will hear again today, that this plan has actually
12 been in development since Hurricane Irene. We
13 still want to hear about how that revision process
14 worked and what portions of the revised plans were
15 procedures that were identified and implemented
16 during Irene and Sandy, as well as those
17 procedures that were identified post-Irene and
18 implemented during Sandy.

19 While we all learned a lot from
20 Irene, we are concerned that by not updating the
21 hurricane emergency plan until days prior to
22 Sandy, that many of the NYCHA staff, especially
23 new staff, may not have been able to implement all
24 aspects of the plan.

25 Mr. Chairman, there is planning and

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2 execution. We will like to know what parts of the
3 hurricane plan NYCHA executed during Sandy and
4 what parts it did not. For instance, the plan
5 describes a comprehensive program for determining
6 who evacuated and who stayed behind. If NYCHA had
7 that in place during Sandy, it may have had a
8 better picture of where people were and it may
9 have been better able to coordinate help.

10 The plan also refers to resident
11 relation teams which were to be comprised of staff
12 from Family Services, community operations, and
13 the developments. These teams were supposed to
14 provide information and assistance to all affected
15 residents and they were supposed to immediately
16 check on special need residents after the storm.
17 But from what we saw at many places, Red Hook, for
18 instance, there were no resident relation teams or
19 they did not function as they were supposed to.

20 Lastly, as I mentioned at the last
21 hearing, we are concerned about how senior
22 residents factor into NYCHA's emergency planning.
23 NYCHA told us about its list of special need
24 residents, which are the residents it takes care
25 to check on first after an emergency, but the

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2 special needs list only includes residents that
3 self-identify as being mobility-impaired or on
4 life support. The list does not include seniors
5 who, while they may not self-report as mobility-
6 impaired or on life support, may still need help
7 during an emergency.

8 The list also does not include
9 residents that development staff knows may have
10 special needs, even if they may not have been
11 self-identified. We are concerned that neither of
12 these group is taken into account in NYCHA's
13 emergency plan; and, if that's so, we hope that
14 will change.

15 NYCHA has 42 buildings for senior
16 citizens only. Of NYCHA's 403, 357 authorized
17 tenants in your traditional public housing, 18.5%
18 are senior citizens and 28.4% are minors under the
19 age of 18. Of NYCHA's 178, 895 rental units, 900,
20 800, and 22 are designated for seniors only, and
21 7,694 are retrofitted for individuals with
22 mobility impairment. These are housing units or
23 populations readily identified as possibly needing
24 assistance during any emergency, including a
25 prolonged blackout.

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2 Mr. Chairman, I know that NYCHA
3 staff knocked on residents' doors, however, I was
4 told that in one of my developments, staff knocked
5 on every door; and, yet in another development,
6 nobody knocked on any resident's door, not even on
7 the ones that were self-identified to your list.

8 As I said, this is just a few
9 examples and I expect that we will cover these and
10 other issues during the hearing. I also want to
11 let you know, Mr. Chairman, that I've been going
12 to my developments and talking to my residents and
13 there are many of them who have told me that
14 they've yet to receive the rent abatement that was
15 supposed to be issued now in the new year for lack
16 of essential services, and so it appears it's
17 happened in some places, but not in others. So we
18 could discuss that at some point outside of this
19 hearing.

20 For everyone who is here today, if
21 you plan to testify, you need to fill one of these
22 out and hand it to the sergeant at the back of the
23 room. And, Mr. Chairman, the floor is yours.

24 JOHN RHEA: Thank you. Good
25 afternoon. First, let me state with clarity for

1
2 the record that I was not scheduled to testify nor
3 be present at the committee's January 17th hearing
4 on Hurricane Sandy. The committee's chair and
5 staff were aware well in advance who from NYCHA
6 would be testifying and that the team did not
7 include me. At no time did I nor anyone on my
8 staff communicate in any form to anyone that I was
9 on jury duty and suggest that as the reason for me
10 not attending. As always, it is my distinct
11 pleasure to represent the Authority here today.

12 Chairwoman Rosie Mendez, members of
13 the Public Housing Committee, and other
14 distinguished members of the City Council, thank
15 you for this opportunity to discuss the New York
16 City Housing Authority's Hurricane Emergency
17 procedure and its implementation before, during,
18 and after Superstorm Sandy. I am John Rhea,
19 Chairman of the New York City Housing Authority,
20 and with me at the dais today are Cecil House,
21 General Manager; Carlos Laboy-Diaz, Executive Vice
22 President for Operations; and Natalie Rivers,
23 Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative
24 Officer.

25 As an agency serving over 600,000

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2 New Yorkers and an employer of roughly 12,000, we
3 at the New York City Housing Authority take our
4 responsibility to prepare residents and staff for
5 emergencies very seriously. Accordingly, we have
6 had a hurricane emergency procedure in place since
7 1964 and have updated it, as needed, since then.
8 Like much of our most important work, the
9 procedure has changed with time, adapting to new
10 realities, accounting for the incredibly diverse
11 and rapidly changing communities we serve and
12 incorporating best practices accumulated over the
13 years. This afternoon, I will outline the recent
14 history of the hurricane emergency procedure,
15 beginning with the aftermath of Hurricane Irene in
16 August 2011, and ending with our implementation of
17 the procedure before, during, and after Superstorm
18 Sandy. I will also share information on our
19 current effort to further enhance this document in
20 advance of future storms.

21 The development and maintenance of
22 emergency procedures is an ongoing process for
23 NYCHA. We continually refine and rework our
24 procedures as we are presented with new
25 information and face new challenges. As I

1
2 mentioned, the hurricane emergency procedure was
3 first established in 1964. NYCHA has refined the
4 procedure several times since then; and after
5 Hurricane Irene in 2011, we made yet another
6 update.

7 During prior testimonies before
8 this committee we have shared the details of our
9 extensive preparation effort for Irene. From that
10 work, we learned many lessons and recognize that a
11 21st century NYCHA would need to revamp and
12 rethink our approach, given increasing frequency
13 of extreme weather events in the Northeast, so we
14 began an internal review of the procedure, led by
15 our Department of Procedures Development and
16 Administration, or DPDA. DPDA is responsible for
17 working with administering departments to develop
18 and maintain NYCHA's standard operating
19 procedures, including the numerous procedures that
20 govern specific kinds of emergencies. They are
21 the crucial link between the research and best
22 practices that we collect from our partners across
23 the country and the NYCHA employees that spring to
24 action during times of crises. DPDA's review
25 resulted in the rapid formation of a cross

1
2 departmental committee tasked with revising the
3 hurricane procedure. This committee, led by
4 Natalie Rivers and DPDA, was comprised of
5 representatives from the Departments of Capital
6 Projects, Security, Communications, Property
7 Management, Technical Services, Emergency
8 Services, Research and Management Analysis, State
9 and City Legislative Affairs, Community Programs
10 and Development, Information Technology, Human
11 Resources, and Family Services. Also, part of the
12 committee were several of our property management
13 bureau directors who play a crucial role in
14 training and overseeing front line staff in their
15 roles during times of crisis.

16 Over the course of several months,
17 this team developed recommendations for changes to
18 the procedure. This process took place over a
19 series of meetings of the entire committee, many
20 smaller meetings between DPDA and individual
21 departments and several rounds of feedback and
22 refinement. Concurrently, senior staff had also
23 established contact with our partners at the
24 City's Office of Emergency Management, OEM, and
25 FEMA immediately after the storm, sharing best

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2 practices in order to develop and implement a
3 broader Irene after-action plan. This plan
4 included items that would eventually appear in the
5 update hurricane procedure, as well as several
6 others that called for more fundamental policy
7 changes.

8 Through these efforts, the NYCHA
9 team examined and made substantial changes and
10 additions to every aspect of the procedure,
11 eventually arriving at a working draft. In every
12 case, the changes improved our capacity to respond
13 efficiently to future hurricanes, both by
14 providing enhanced customer service to residents
15 and acting swiftly to secure affected buildings.

16 To cite some examples, the updated
17 procedure called for NYCHA to form pre and post-
18 storm inspection teams to ensure the safety of
19 residents and the soundness of our buildings;
20 establish several non-Zone A sites for staff to
21 stay overnight during the storm in order to more
22 quickly respond the next day; and develop pre-
23 approved communications templates for flyers in
24 multiple languages to alert residents of
25 evacuations and other efforts.

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2 The working draft was tested in
3 several ways. A team of central office staff led
4 by the Departments of Emergency Services,
5 Security, and Operations conducted a tabletop
6 exercise based on the procedure. This exercise,
7 which also included director-level staff from the
8 Departments of Human Resources, Family Services,
9 Finance, Capital Projects, and Information
10 Technology, laid out the circumstances of a
11 fictional hurricane, requiring team members to
12 collaboratively problem-solve and identify areas
13 of potential weakness in the draft procedure and
14 other pertinent NYCHA policies. The exercise was
15 attended and observed by crisis management experts
16 from the Office of Emergency Management.

17 In addition, several committee
18 representatives took the updated draft back to
19 their respective departments for further review.
20 The departments included Social Services, now
21 known as Family Services, Information Technology,
22 Research and Management, Capital Projects, and
23 Communications. The members of these departments,
24 who we knew would be critical to a successful
25 implementation effort, provided important new

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2 insights and were also able to familiarize
3 themselves with the document as it neared
4 finalization. In keeping with our annual
5 practice, we also encouraged NYCHA employees
6 throughout September, National Preparedness Month,
7 in a series of drills, exercises, and activities
8 meant to raise awareness of our emergency planning
9 efforts.

10 As a result of this comprehensive
11 process, a newly updated and approved hurricane
12 emergency procedure was in place before Superstorm
13 Sandy reached our shores. When we confirmed with
14 OEM that Sandy was headed toward New York and was
15 likely to impact many public housing residents, I
16 and the general manager convened a conference call
17 informing executive vice presidents and other
18 appropriate staff that the procedure had been
19 activated. We immediately began to implement the
20 procedure, beginning by opening our Emergency
21 Operations Center and establishing a presence at
22 OEM, where I was personally engaged in daily
23 briefings with Mayor Bloomberg, deputy mayors, and
24 my fellow agency heads.

25 NYCHA employees in the field and at

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2 headquarters continued to successfully implement
3 the procedure throughout the storm and during the
4 days that followed. However, as with any plan, we
5 did have to adjust in real-time to the enormity of
6 the challenges we faced, including the loss of
7 power to our headquarter offices in lower
8 Manhattan and the shutdown of most means of public
9 transportation. To give just one example of our
10 ability to make thoughtful and effective
11 adjustments, the procedure calls for NYCHA to
12 transfer important equipment to the areas most
13 likely to be affected by the storm. However, once
14 we understood the magnitude of the storm, we
15 decided to move this equipment, which included
16 generators and pumps to central locations outside
17 of Zone A in order to ensure their safety.

18 Moving forward, as Cecil House
19 mentioned last month in our initial testimony on
20 Superstorm Sandy, we learned many valuable lessons
21 during the storm and know that there is much work
22 left to do. We continue our efforts on behalf of
23 affected residents and have already begun work as
24 part of the City's broad effort to create a Sandy
25 after-action plan to identify updates to the

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2 hurricane emergency procedure. One important
3 example is our realization of the need for local
4 branches of our Emergency Operations Center in
5 affected communities so that residents, elected
6 officials, and other stakeholders have a direct
7 line to us and can access up to the moment
8 information and guidance. We are also in the
9 process of analyzing NYCHA's role in an emergency
10 such as this.

11 We continue to think strategically
12 about how we can fulfill our fundamental
13 commitment to provide safe, secure, and affordable
14 housing, while also facilitating access to
15 resources that will ensure that residents receive
16 continued services before, during, and after
17 emergencies. To this end, the general manager's
18 office is compiling a list of lessons learned and
19 preliminary recommendations based on feedback from
20 employees at all levels. In addition, we have
21 already begun the process of reaching out to
22 important stakeholders, including residents, local
23 elected officials, and thought leaders in the
24 private and nonprofit sectors, to enhance and
25 solidify these recommendations. We look forward

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2 to working with the City Council during that
3 process, and to completing a newly updated
4 procedure well before this year's hurricane
5 season.

6 Thank you again. I'm happy to
7 answer any questions you may have.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman. Present at the hearing today, to my far
10 right is Council Member Halloran from Queens--

11 [Crosstalk]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: --Madam
13 Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That is
15 correct on many levels, yes. Council Member Jimmy
16 Van Bramer from Queens, Council Member Maria
17 Carmen Arroyo from the Bronx, not from Brooklyn,
18 right? From the Bronx. Apparently, last hearing,
19 I placed her in Brooklyn. And to my left is
20 Council Member Recchia from Brooklyn.

21 Thank you. So at the last hearing,
22 Mr. House explained about the emergency list of
23 individuals who have self-identified and,
24 according to NYCHA, there were 3,300 mobility-
25 impaired residents and 140 residents on life

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2 support that are living within what is the
3 mandatory evacuation Zone A. But this list leaves
4 out two important groups of people: Seniors who
5 haven't self-identified as mobility-impaired or on
6 life support, and residents whose development
7 staff knows they have special needs, even if they
8 haven't reported. What extra steps did NYCHA take
9 to warn these groups and to check on them after
10 Sandy hit New York?

11 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Good afternoon,
12 my name is Carlos Laboy-Diaz, Executive Vice
13 President for Operations. As we addressed through
14 the presentation that we made last time, we
15 reached to all the families in Zone A through the
16 teams that we deploy in the field.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So for
18 evacuation purposes, you reached out to everyone
19 prior to Sandy hit.

20 [Crosstalk]

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Now post Sandy
22 hitting, who did NYCHA reach out to?

23 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I'm sorry, can
24 you repeat the question, ma'am?

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Prior

1
2 to Sandy hitting New York, the Housing Authority
3 reached out to everyone in Zone A to get them to
4 evacuate, is that correct?

5 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. After
7 Sandy hit and we were all in the dark, right? Who
8 did NYCHA reach out to in those developments in
9 Zone A? Just this mobility-impaired list or was
10 there a bigger list, did you knock on every door?

11 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We initiated
12 several outreach efforts. The first priority was
13 the mobility-impaired and the people with life
14 support system, but also through the days we also
15 reach--we knocked every door in Zone A apartments.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I'm sorry, can
17 you repeat that? I--

18 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [Interposing]
19 We did several efforts first, we reached the
20 families with some--the self-identified families,
21 but also we reached--we knocked on every door in
22 Zone A again.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So
24 after Sandy hit, you went to the 3,300 and the
25 140, and then after that, you went and knocked on

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every door.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We knock on every door, yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In every development.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: In the Zone A.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In Zone A. And you didn't do it in non-Zone A that may have been flooded?

CECIL HOUSE: So in the impacted areas, so after--sorry.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Move the mic closer.

CECIL HOUSE: Council Member, it's Cecil House, General Manager.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

CECIL HOUSE: So we focused initially on the self-identified lists that we had and then, as resources became available and we partnered with other agencies across the city, we began to extend our outreach to others across the impacted areas. We used volunteers, our own employees, as well as other agencies that were coming in to assist with the recovery efforts.

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And as time progressed, we were able to cover, we think, all of the impacted areas.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So just define impacted area Zone A, is impacted area--

CECIL HOUSE: [Interposing] No, it's beyond zone--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --flooded, impacted area flooded and--

CECIL HOUSE: Those that--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --blackout.

CECIL HOUSE: Right. Those areas that at that time had a loss of essential services or had a particular need for assistance as a result of the hurricane. But our efforts were not focused exclusively on Zone A, once the hurricane occurred, we knew that the impacts were beyond Zone A and so we had to make sure to adjust our focus to include those that were impacted.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So I guess outside of here, we should have a discussion because, for example, in Baruch Houses, in my district--

CECIL HOUSE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --I know you

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knocked on every door--

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --'cause I was on the phone with someone just to see what was happening in the building when, you know, there was all this noise and people were knocking on doors.

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: However, in Lillian Wald Houses, the development right north of there, north of Houston, there was no door knocking and even the individuals on that emergency list were not reached out to, and this was told to me by those residents who have self-identified to be on that list.

CECIL HOUSE: Okay. So we'll need to check our data on that, and we'll be happy to discuss that with you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Okay. can you tell me how many seniors live in Zone A?

CECIL HOUSE: I do think I have that number.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And/or in the impacted area? Or both? I'm assuming those

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numbers are different.

CECIL HOUSE: We have--

[Crosstalk]

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [Interposing]

We have in the impacted area, we have 14 buildings that are senior that were affected.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That were

senior only.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yes. Of those,

two are in Zone A.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And how many

of those buildings were flooded, of those 14

senior buildings?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Well like the

general manager mentioned, they have--they

sustained different type of damage, some in the

Lower East Side was the loss of power when Con Ed

lost power; when in Coney Island, you have flooded

buildings that damaged all the electrical and

heating systems.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

MALE VOICE: And how many residents

that is.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you tell

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me how many residents that is or how many units?

JOHN RHEA: In terms of seniors?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Correct.

JOHN RHEA: We'll get you the exact number. So the question, just to confirm, is how many seniors in Zone A, how many seniors in the impacted areas.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Correct.

JOHN RHEA: Okay. We'll get you the number. 'Cause obviously, there are many seniors in non-senior buildings and we'll get you the exact number.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Correct.

Okay. And do we have people that want to ask--

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I'm just going to ask a question and then I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues, and then I'll come back at the end and ask questions. But in terms for future emergencies, will you be using the more expanded list of all of these individuals in senior buildings or special needs that may not be on the list?

CECIL HOUSE: So as we mentioned in

1
2 our prior testimony in the prior hearing, we're
3 going to work with Council and community-based
4 organizations to see if we can enhance the list
5 that we have. Officially, though, we are--through
6 our regulations with HUD, we're only allowed to
7 produce that list based upon self-identified, but
8 that doesn't have to be the only list that we
9 maintain, so we are open to improving upon that
10 part of our procedure.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Before I turn
12 it over to Council Member Halloran, on page three
13 of your testimony today, you say that--it's in the
14 middle of the second paragraph--Department of
15 Procedures Development Administration, DPDA, is
16 responsible for working with administering
17 department's develop and maintain NYCHA standard
18 operating procedures, including numerous
19 procedures that govern specific kinds of
20 emergencies. Can you tell me what other
21 emergencies and what other plans do you have?

22 NATALIE RIVERS: So there are--I'm
23 sorry?

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you
25 identify yourself--

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NATALIE RIVERS: Oh, I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --for the record?

NATALIE RIVERS: Natalie Rivers, Executive Vice President for Administration, Chief Administrative Officer. There are, in addition to the hurricane procedure, there are approximately 20 different emergency procedures from transit strikes, to snowstorm, to blackout. And we can certainly provide you with a full and comprehensive list of all these procedures.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And is there a procedure that takes all of these emergencies and puts them all into place at once, just as happened during Sandy?

NATALIE RIVERS: So we actually have an emergency procedure manual which pretty much brings these 20 different procedures together. And one of the things that we're going to be doing as part of this refinement process is to make sure they're better integrated and more comprehensive.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And can the City Council get a copy of those emergency

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procedures? Yes?

CECIL HOUSE: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

CECIL HOUSE: Do you want the current version or you want them after we update them?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I would say both, yes. Thank you. Okay. Council Member Halloran.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Thank you, Madam Chair, appreciate it. I have to go meet with the Law Department on an issue. But I had one question and it just has to do with the recordkeeping process that we've been discussing. It's my understanding--and please correct me if I'm wrong--that when a resident comes into NYCHA, there's a pretty extensive questionnaire, a pretty extensive information packet that's filled out. We've discussed at length about seniors needing to be notified, persons with disabilities or mobility issues to be notified. Is it NYCHA's position that we don't have that information categorized when an application is filled out, when a renewal is done, when bills are collected? It seems to me

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2 that if you're applying to become a member to get
3 an apartment in a NYCHA facility, one of the
4 information pieces is the date of birth, so it
5 would seem to me that you would have at your
6 fingertips a list of everybody over age 65 and,
7 therefore, a senior. It would seem to me that,
8 given our requirements to do things like comply
9 with the Americans with Disability Act, we would
10 have the ability at intake to know people with
11 limitations that would need to be notified. Is it
12 a inability to talk through the system to get that
13 information? That because at the last hearing, I
14 believe the testimony was--and the chair can
15 correct me if I'm wrong or the record can correct
16 me if I'm wrong--is that we don't have a
17 comprehensive list of the people who would fit
18 those categories to be notified, that you're
19 working on producing such a list, but is that
20 information not already available to you in the
21 first instance?

22 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We have the
23 information in the system, we have all the
24 information that you mentioned, however, the
25 information about people's disability, it is

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voluntary and that's what the rules and regulation says.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: So just like a HIPAA kind of bump that we run into here, so instead of being able to sort of get that information in a pseudo involuntary sense for purposes of a application, we're relying on a notification that complies with the HIPAA directive.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Well the document that we submit to the tenant, application or what you call these--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Right.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --the recertification, which is annual--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Right.

Right.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --have a section for you to self-identify--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Right.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --but, again, like I said--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: It's voluntary.

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CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --it's

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voluntary.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: All

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right, and just on that line, is it fair to say

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that you have explored making that mandatory for

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purposes of emergency information and that HIPAA

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is the block to that, that's the issue--

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[Crosstalk]

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CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [Interposing] -

11

-fair housing issue and it's a little more

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complicated, we're exploring different options,

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but at this time--

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[Pause]

15

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --at this time,

16

it's voluntary.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Okay.

18

Thank you.

19

[Pause]

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CECIL HOUSE: We just wanted to

21

clarify, it's not HIPAA specifically, it is--

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[Crosstalk]

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CECIL HOUSE: --it's a housing

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regulation, but I think the context is correct.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Thank

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you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you,
Council Member Halloran. Okay. Council Member
Recchia, to be followed by Council Member Arroyo.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Good
afternoon, Chairman Rhea and your staff, I'm glad
to see you're not on jury duty. You got to laugh.

First, I want to start off by
saying the preparedness that you and your staff
and your employees of NYCHA did was very good. I
mean, I worked with them, it was, you know, I
think you got that part down, the only issue is
the list of those seniors that stay behind who
need assistance moving out. How could that list
be made more available? 'Cause during the storm,
we did not know which seniors were disabled who
was still remaining in their homes to get them
help. So I mean, I think, is there an idea that
you might have on how we--and like I know some of
this is probably confidential so that's the
problem, but how do we, you know, figure out for
the next storm because we sent people going
apartment to apartment when if we knew what people
were in those apartments, we could have sent

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volunteers straight up there.

JOHN RHEA: So I think, you know, your question, Council Member Recchia, also combined with Council Member Halloran's question about are we looking at ways to get additional information or to encourage people to self-report, more people to self-report, or to find ways to get information that's more than involuntary are things we want to explore. Because, certainly in a crisis, more information is better than less and sharing that information with other sister agencies as well as volunteer organizations could be incredibly helpful to us sending our limited resources to those who need it most. So we share your goals.

Having said that, there are legal and regulatory reasons why we can't mandatorily--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

JOHN RHEA: --require people to provide us with the information. And secondly, there are legal limitations on our ability to share that information and in the middle of the crisis, obviously, there is a, you know, a strong outcry, NYCHA, NYCHA, give us the information, we

1
2 can help you, and we have to--and balance our
3 desire to provide that information to those who
4 want to be helpful with our legal constraints. So
5 we would appreciate, you know, engagement with the
6 City Council and other electeds around, you know,
7 how can we continue to protect privacy, how can we
8 continue to enforce things like fair housing,
9 while at the same time, giving the Authority and
10 our partners additional information that can serve
11 in the best interests of residents.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Yeah,
13 'cause that, it was a major problem, you know, who
14 was still there, who had to get them food and so
15 forth and I think that's an issue that you really
16 have to try to address and try to figure it out.

17 In your plan, in your evacuation
18 plan, you know, standard procedure manual that you
19 have, I'm looking at the post, all right, and it
20 says the following supplies, including but not
21 limited, must be maintained during the emergency
22 at each location and it gives a list of things,
23 okay? Is that for each facility, is that for each
24 building?

25 JOHN RHEA: You take this one.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Was that
3 for each building, for each facility?

4 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Can you
5 indicate the page?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Page 37.

7 [Crosstalk]

8 JOHN RHEA: --37.

9 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yeah, those
10 items are per property per management office,
11 that's the way that, you know, we organize the
12 structure and some of those items are for the use
13 of the staff.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Oh, so--

15 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: For the use of
16 the staff, yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Okay.

18 Because it gives a long list of things that, you
19 know, and equipment for use, for staff use and
20 rapid deployment to impacted areas and, you know,
21 I just wanted to know where all this stuff was,
22 you know what I mean, in Coney Island. You know?

23 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We can provide
24 you that information, the details, but it was--the
25 thing with Coney Island is in Zone A, that mean

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that nobody can stay in Zone A--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --they have to get out. You will find those items in the fallback property because that is the place that will not be--for example, the blankets and for the staff to stay--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --things like that.

[Crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: So where was the fallback for?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: It's in the attachment to the procedures.

NATALIE RIVERS: It's attachment number four. And so staff were required to leave the evacuation--

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

NATALIE RIVERS: --zones and they were assigned to a fallback or an alternate location to spend the night so that they could be redeployed immediately following the storms.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Yeah.

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2 JOHN RHEA: If I have this right,
3 for basically for Coney Island, though, it was
4 Unity warehouse.

5 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yeah, it's--

6 [Background noise]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Unity
8 warehouse. And so when they say supplies and
9 stuff, is that supplies just for the staff or is
10 that supplies for the whole apartment complex?

11 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: For the staff--

12 NATALIE RIVERS: For the staff.

13 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --for the
14 staff.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: For the
16 staff, okay. Now we really need to have a--the
17 big issue came is that these apartment complexes,
18 the developments, they really needed supplies, you
19 know what I mean? And I think we have to figure
20 out, especially like in the large areas, like I
21 have one of the largest number of public housing
22 in New York City, I think I'm the second or third
23 largest, I have over 42 buildings, and I think you
24 have to try to figure out, you know, in a location
25 that's safe where we could keep storage of

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2 equipment, you know. 'Cause the biggest problem
3 is that people didn't have blankets, people didn't
4 have flashlights, people--you know, everything. I
5 mean, have you ever taken something like that into
6 consideration on what to do so people--'cause that
7 was a, you know, getting all this stuff was..

8 JOHN RHEA: Right.

9 CECIL HOUSE: Yes.

10 JOHN RHEA: I think this is a more
11 complex question. We certainly share, as closely
12 as anyone in the city, concern for the well-being
13 of public housing residents, it's what we do every
14 day to ensure they have safe, secure housing, and
15 to connect them with important vital services on a
16 daily basis. I think there is a critical question
17 here though about the responsibility to ensure
18 some basic needs and necessities are met in times
19 of crises and who's the principal agency
20 responsible for ensuring that, and then thinking
21 through what's the logistical setup that would
22 accommodate that best. And to be very direct, I
23 mean, that's not something that we believe we can
24 answer on our own.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right,

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2 that's why I think, I really think that we need to
3 have a meeting with the members of the City
4 Council, you know, especially those members who
5 are in Zone A and your office and OEM at the table
6 because I think that this issue has to be
7 addressed, how do we handle, God forbid, if there
8 is another serious storm and who's responsible for
9 what. 'Cause I think that was a big issue, okay?
10 And we've never seen a storm like this, hopefully
11 we never see it again, but, you know, this is a
12 big issue.

13 One issue I just want to, you know,
14 in assessing, and I know with the plan, I think
15 you have to look at some of the causes, what
16 caused such severe damage of these public housing
17 units. And I'm right on the water and, I just
18 want to bring this to your attention, with
19 Gravesend Houses that really got wiped out,
20 Gravesend Houses is right on the bay in Coney--I
21 mean, Coney Island, it's not on the ocean side,
22 it's on the bay side, and if you look right down
23 the block, you see straight out to the water,
24 there's no bulkhead, there's no wall. And at
25 6:30, right, before the storm hit, okay, the high

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2 tide was going to be like 8 o'clock, at 6:30 I
3 went in and the water was coming up already. And
4 I think in order for us to protect Gravesend
5 Houses, all right, we really need to address that
6 problem at the end of the block where there is no
7 wall there whatsoever and the water just comes
8 over every, I mean, Irene, you know, 1992, the
9 nor'easter and I think that that has to be
10 addressed. Because if we address it, if we could
11 somehow build some type of bulkhead or wall there,
12 I think we would have less damage.

13 So when you prepare, I'm sure
14 you're preparing a report to mitigate damages, I'd
15 love to sit down with you and go out there with
16 you to show you exactly what I'm talking about.
17 Because the housing developments on the ocean,
18 there's nothing we could do, the only thing we
19 could do is build dunes on the beach, and if you
20 do that, then we have to plan vegetation 'cause
21 that will keep the sand from moving. But on the--
22 'cause I'm very concerned about Gravesend Houses.

23 JOHN RHEA: Well we welcome to
24 visit at Gravesend with you sooner than later,
25 'cause--

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COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

JOHN RHEA: --as you said, we're right in the middle of working closely with our sister agencies, the task force that the mayor has put together, as well as the Secretary Donovan is leading to look at mitigation alternatives and, certainly, we would love to have your input around that.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: We've been joined by Council Member Margaret Chin from Manhattan. Council Member Arroyo.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you, Madam Chair. On the work that the Authority is doing to update or upgrade or amend your procedures, and the general manager testified that well in advance of the hurricane season, that will be concluded. This is well in advance of the hurricane season, right? So how soon do you think that these new procedures or amended procedures will be available?

CECIL HOUSE: We expect to complete our after-action report within the next month and

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2 then we'll begin the task of making the
3 modifications to the actual procedures and we
4 expect them to be in effect and at some level
5 trained before we get to June 1st.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: On Council
7 Member Recchia's concern regarding the dangers
8 that certain areas of our city confront or the
9 risk, just given the geography of the developments
10 and my district, thank God, we did not experience
11 the issues that other areas of the city did. In a
12 conversation about capital funding--and we met, I
13 believe, it was this week with my office met with
14 your staff on helping us understand what the
15 capital needs of NYCHA are in general. We have
16 focused a lot of energy on security cameras and
17 security systems and much of that conversation
18 with Council Members were initiated by the
19 residents and the resident associations because
20 this is what they want to see happen in their
21 developments. But we have never really talked to
22 you in any comprehensive way about what the
23 individual needs of every development are,
24 including should we build the wall to prevent the
25 flooding from happening that knocked out the power

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2 and the elevators and... I mean, what happened in
3 lower Manhattan with Con Edison is outside of your
4 scope, but in Coney Island, there is some
5 perimeter walls that can be built that can
6 safeguard some of the development. So have you,
7 in your assessment of the capital needs for the
8 Authority, gone through point by point what are
9 the capital investments that we must make to
10 safeguard the developments from future--and I'm
11 assuming it's mostly water damage, right?

12 CECIL HOUSE: So our process for
13 addressing Sandy recovery issues does include
14 those kinds of questions. There are sort of
15 multiple tiers of resources available so when it
16 comes to the actual physical structure of the
17 developments, we're pretty far along in that
18 assessment and we're working with other city
19 organizations, you know, Brad Gair's [phonetic]
20 housing recovery group and Seth Pinsky's group,
21 focused on broadly protecting the city to most
22 effectively utilize the resources that we have.
23 But we have been having discussions with them
24 about how we can protect the public housing
25 properties as well.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So do you
3 have a full list? When will you have a full list?
4 For every development, let's, you know, 'cause I--

5 CECIL HOUSE: [Interposing] And
6 then after our conversation actually I went back
7 and I talked to the team, it appears that a few
8 years ago we used to provide that list of capital
9 needs to the Council Members and so we went back
10 and we've decided we're going to go back and look
11 at the needs that we have in place now and begin
12 to share that information with Council Members as
13 we go forward.

14 JOHN RHEA: So we have a
15 comprehensive physical needs assessment that looks
16 at across all our properties what capital
17 investments are required. So the short answer to
18 your question is, yes, we have that, and as the
19 general manager suggested, we could share that
20 with Council Members by their individual
21 developments.

22 In terms of a comprehensive list of
23 what types of mitigation investments should we or
24 could we make that is really a result of the
25 aftermath of Sandy is in process. And we

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2 certainly, as we struggle out to find out where
3 we're going to get the \$6 billion for our basic
4 reinvestment needs, mitigation to a large extent--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

6 [Interposing] You said \$6 billion.

7 JOHN RHEA: Yes, as I've talked to
8 this Council and this committee on many occasions,
9 we have \$6 billion of current unmet capital needs
10 in public housing developments--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

12 [Interposing] But that does not include mitigation
13 strategies.

14 JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] That does
15 not include mitigation strategies, so what I was
16 going to say, that would be in addition to our
17 existing needs and when people are in need of
18 food, they usually aren't thinking about, you
19 know, the next level of self-actualization so--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

21 [Interposing] Seems to me that we need to worry--

22 JOHN RHEA: --we've been very
23 focused--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --about
25 that though.

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2 JOHN RHEA: --we need to think
3 about it and our work now incorporates that but I
4 do have to be clear, it really only incorporates
5 it for the low lying areas that were impacted--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

7 [Interposing] Understood.

8 JOHN RHEA: --by Sandy.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I guess,
10 you know, we heard about Zone A and these flood
11 maps that are now coming out where there were some
12 recommendations about how we should build or
13 rebuild in certain areas. Is NYCHA part of that
14 conversation? And, given what we're experiencing
15 now, when we repair boilers in developments that
16 were affected, are you going to install them at
17 the same level that you had prior to the storm?
18 What are your adjustments in the rebuilding
19 effort? Just to replace things that were damaged
20 due to the storm, and I realize that that's a
21 different list, but I think it--we have to react
22 in a different way, we can't do it the same way
23 we've always done.

24 And the only reason why cameras got
25 on my capital list was because the residents

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2 brought it up as a need, the Authority did not
3 engage me in that conversation and I think we need
4 to change how we engage in this process. It's not
5 our life's dream to beat you up at these hearings,
6 certainly not mine, it is how we can, given the
7 resources that we all have available to us, how
8 can we partner to address the very serious needs
9 that NYCHA has in its developments.

10 And many of us have a great deal
11 more NYCHA developments than others, but I
12 certainly am really wholly committed to working
13 with the Authority and making sure that I can be
14 part of helping you get the resources you need in
15 advance. And so don't come to me in April to ask
16 me for funding for fiscal year '14 because it's
17 too late, we need to work this a year or so in
18 advance to prepare our requests for capital for
19 NYCHA. I'm wholly committed to doing that with
20 you, but please tell us what we need to invest and
21 how to prioritize those investments so that we can
22 work with our residents and advise them and let
23 them know in advance.

24 The resident relation teams, is the
25 first I hear that this exists as part of NYCHA's

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2 response to crisis, every development is supposed
3 to have one. Can we know who's on the team for
4 each development so that as we put boots on the
5 ground to help to respond to issues that we know
6 who we are tapping and assisting? Because we
7 don't want to get in anybody's way, we just want
8 to help get it done better.

9 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: The resident
10 relation team is one of the lessons learned from
11 Irene in which we have several departments and we
12 are only one NYCHA, and as part of that, you have
13 community ops, you have operations, property
14 management, and--

15 [Crosstalk]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
17 [Interposing] I don't know who any of those people
18 are for any of the developments in my district.

19 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [Interposing]
20 Well as part of the lessons learned, we will take
21 your comment to also integrate volunteers and
22 elective to this part of these teams.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: On the
24 issue of supplies and critical--just give me
25 information--

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CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]

Hold on.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --that's
all I'm asking for.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council
Member, Mr. Chairman?

JOHN RHEA: Yeah, we just wanted
to--if we can clarify. So the resident relation
teams are developed as a response to the incident.
So--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
[Interposing] So they're not in advance.

JOHN RHEA: Right. So what we need
to respond--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
[Interposing] They're not static, it's every time
there's an event, this team gets put together.

JOHN RHEA: And there may not be
one for every development, they may cover a
development, and they may cover--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

JOHN RHEA: --multiple
developments.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

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Okay. 'Cause it appears that in each development, that's what I'm reading in the--

JOHN RHEA: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --documents that are prepared for us for the hearing, so I want to know the resident relations team for Patterson, Mitchell, Mott Haven, Melrose--

JOHN RHEA: This is--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --Jackson, Adams, St. Mary's--

JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] Right, and this is a learning process, we learned a lot in Hurricane Sandy, as we do in Irene--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

JOHN RHEA: --and we will be modifying--

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

JOHN RHEA: --our procedures accordingly.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. Well thank you, that clarifies. Vital supplies-- batteries, flashlights, water--I'm conflicted with expecting you to provide that for residents, I think that should be part of we as individuals

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2 preparing to respond that we should have that in
3 our homes just as a matter of course. Do you
4 think it's your responsibility to supply those
5 things to residents?

6 JOHN RHEA: So I want to reiterate
7 that I'm confident that no agency or individual
8 was more concerned about the well-being of NYCHA
9 residents than NYCHA staff and the Authority as a
10 whole, it's our job, it's what we do. With that
11 in mind, we worked really hard, for example, in
12 the Rockaways to do preparedness initiatives and
13 activities long before Irene--

14 MALE VOICE: Yes.

15 JOHN RHEA: --and before Sandy, and
16 a large part of that is to help residents prepare
17 themselves for an emergency like this, including
18 things like having go bags in their homes in the
19 event of an incident like Hurricane Sandy. And
20 many residents--and we passed out go bags and we
21 got private sector organizations and others to
22 fund those things and provide us with them and to
23 teach residents about the challenges they would be
24 confronted with in a blackout and in a hurricane
25 and in an emergency and severe weather situations.

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2 And so we have already taken a substantial amount
3 of responsibility to work with our residents
4 around these areas, but I still will go back to
5 what I said to Council Member Recchia's question,
6 I think there's a broader need to focus in on the
7 learnings after something like Sandy, the
8 magnitude of families and individuals that can and
9 will be impacted in a scenario like the one we
10 went through and what's the principal agency that
11 owns that responsibility, what's the collection of
12 agencies that need to come together to ensure the
13 resources are available, and then what is the
14 logistical setup in order to ensure food, water,
15 and other needs are being met.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. So
17 on the logistical setup, one of the criticisms
18 that we heard from the public testimony at the
19 last hearing and in the other hearings that we've
20 held regarding Sandy is that there were makeshift
21 kind of distribution points that were set up,
22 volunteers really hit the ground and organized
23 efforts, and the concern was that they were not
24 allowed to stay in certain spaces that NYCHA had
25 made available for the distribution of supplies.

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2 So I hope that one of the things that you're
3 looking at in your modification of your response
4 manual is that affected developments should have a
5 dedicated distribution point where volunteers can
6 come, report to, where supplies can be brought to,
7 maybe not by NYCHA but by private sector and other
8 people that want to be helpful, and use that as a
9 central point of distribution in advance so that
10 the development residents know that X room in X
11 building will be the one place where I can go to
12 see if there is water, if there is batteries, or
13 whatever the case may be. And that then post the
14 event, how we handle that space moving forward be
15 done in such a way where people are not made to
16 feel like they're not welcome to volunteer or to
17 be helpful in the process.

18 A lot of the complaints that we
19 heard from the public is that people were shooed
20 off. And not just NYCHA, I mean, we had hearings
21 that involved other agencies and a lot of the
22 complaints were that those who wanted
23 wholeheartedly to be there and present for their
24 fellow New Yorkers were made to feel like they
25 were in the way, not necessary, not welcomed. And

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2 I would like to see part of that manual include
3 designated space in every development that will
4 enable a distribution point to be set up for the
5 residents of that development.

6 JOHN RHEA: I think we're all
7 nodding, we agree with you--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

9 JOHN RHEA: --so we look forward to
10 that and we think that it would not only--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

12 [Interposing] One more question--

13 [Crosstalk]

14 JOHN RHEA: --ensure resources but
15 give us better direction on who's in charge.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Now thank
17 you, I look forward to that because, you know, the
18 volunteers in the city really were the ones that
19 carried the brunt of the response activity in the
20 city and many were very frustrated because they
21 were not supported in their efforts.

22 JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] So I
23 really--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Generally,
25 and I'm not--

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2 JOHN RHEA: --agree with the first
3 part, but the second part--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
5 [Interposing] No, no, I'm saying generally, this
6 is what--

7 JOHN RHEA: Okay.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --I've
9 heard, I've been to every single hearing--

10 JOHN RHEA: Absolutely.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --and that
12 is a common--

13 JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] But I
14 agree with your--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --message.

16 JOHN RHEA: --point though, I agree
17 with your point that our volunteers bore, you
18 know, a substantial brunt of the response. And
19 what I'm saying, and the reason why I agree a
20 little bit with your second part, is we engaged
21 them in that process, we appreciate what they did,
22 and we agree if we are more coordinated on the
23 front end of that for the future, both in terms of
24 which facilities are or are not available, who's
25 in charge of those facilities, who's responsible

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2 for meeting the volunteers and ensuring they have
3 access to those facilities, a whole laundry list
4 of things that we think we need to work on as we
5 recognize the importance of the volunteer
6 community and responding in a crisis like this.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I think
8 we're saying the same thing.

9 JOHN RHEA: Okay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So have you
11 done or are you thinking about doing a survey of
12 the areas that were ordered to evacuate, many
13 didn't, have you gone back to ask why not? And
14 given the experience that we had with Sandy, would
15 you evacuate if ordered to do so? Because I think
16 the danger here is for us--or the concern is that
17 where people are staying in place and then are
18 not--we don't know they're there, they could be in
19 danger, some health safety issue in many regards--
20 medication, treatments are not being received. So
21 can we talk to our residents to find out, well you
22 didn't leave and that created other issues, given
23 everything that you know today, would your
24 response be different and what we need to do
25 provide for you to evacuate safely?

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2 CECIL HOUSE: So I think as part of
3 our after-action work and our lessons learned, we
4 definitely will engage the residents broadly to
5 make sure that our planning is effective as we
6 move forward. But I think specifically, I think
7 we are doing that. We have brought on a group of
8 supplemental employees through the Department of
9 Labor grant that we announced and they are going
10 around and doing surveys similar to what you're
11 suggesting to collect that information, and we'll
12 integrate that and use that as best as we can.

13 JOHN RHEA: And those are public
14 housing residents that are employed through this
15 Department of Labor grant.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Awesome.

17 JOHN RHEA: And the second part of
18 your question on a more long-term, you know,
19 analysis, not every community responded in the
20 same way, not every public housing community
21 responded in the same way, there were those that
22 were more flexible and more resilient met with the
23 same set of circumstances but responded
24 differently than others, and so one of the things
25 that we want to do as part of this is understand

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2 why did certain communities respond more robustly,
3 including the engagement of volunteers, which is
4 critical, than others. And so there's some other
5 learnings that are more systemic that we're also
6 taking a look at.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And,
8 lastly, that our initiative to move forward the
9 repair of those work orders are not hampered by
10 the response that we've had to make for cleaning
11 up or fixing what broke during the storm.

12 CECIL HOUSE: Absolutely not.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

14 CECIL HOUSE: We're moving forward
15 with our plan--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
17 [Interposing] Say that again.

18 CECIL HOUSE: Absolutely not.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.
20 Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: We've been
22 joined by Council Member Gonzalez from Brooklyn.
23 Council Member Chin.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you,
25 Madam Chair. I know in the last hearing, so

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2 Chairman Rhea is here, so I really wanted to
3 reiterate some of the points that I made last
4 time. But first I do want to let you know that we
5 appreciate a lot of the staff that work in the
6 different development in my district especially at
7 Smith, you know, the manager and the staff that
8 stayed over to take care of the tenant because
9 this time around we couldn't evacuate everybody
10 like we did for Irene. People say hey, it was
11 fine last time, I'm not leaving this time. And I
12 think that was one of the biggest obstacle we had
13 this time around.

14 So looking at, I think in your
15 evaluation in terms of looking at, you know,
16 aftermath, I really want you to focus on in Smith,
17 for example, there's a couple of building that
18 faces South Street, they always get flooded, even
19 just heavy rain, they get flooded 'cause they're
20 right there near the water. So how are you really
21 making those assessment and what kind of
22 improvement are you going to try to make to those
23 building so that to minimize damages when you have
24 a bigger hurricane coming?

25 CECIL HOUSE: So clearly, when it

1
2 comes to the essential systems, we're making sure
3 that we move them out of harm's way and
4 particularly in the Zone A area, so I think that's
5 the first thing that we're going to do as we move
6 forward. And then, to the extent that that kind
7 of flooding impacts other services, we have the
8 opportunity to install more powerful pumps and do
9 some kind of waterproofing, water resiliency. But
10 we haven't made full determinations of all that at
11 this point and it will be a function of the kind
12 of resources that we have available. So we'll be
13 making requests like that through the FEMA process
14 as we move forward.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay. I
16 mean, I really wanted to be informed about what's
17 happening--

18 CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --especially
20 at Smith when we know every time it gets flooded.
21 And we have senior looking out the window who
22 didn't evacuate and say the water is coming up,
23 you know, to the front door. So that's one thing.

24 The other one that when Council
25 Member Arroyo was talking about, which I think we

1
2 all support the public housing in our district,
3 and once again I wanted to reiterate the
4 importance of the community center within NYCHA.
5 And so the capital dollars that's needed to really
6 upgrade these center so that they are the
7 gathering point for people. If, God forbid, this
8 happen again, you know you can go to this center
9 and get help--

10 CECIL HOUSE: Right.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --because in
12 the center, we have one in Smith and we have one
13 in Rutgers, those were the centers that we use--

14 CECIL HOUSE: Yeah.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --to organize
16 the volunteer, all the elected work together, and
17 they opened, they stayed up late, the staffs were
18 helping, and the coordination with the nonprofit
19 that runs those centers were really critical
20 because they were the place where people can come
21 in and get the food and water, blankets, whatever,
22 the distribution site. So I think that is
23 something that I really urge NYCHA to look at how
24 do we support it and in terms of capital needs
25 that the Council should know so that we can help

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2 gather some resources for that because they are
3 such an essential part of our development in the
4 community right there in NYCHA, the community
5 center. So I don't want--I know I keep saying
6 that every time I see you, I just don't want you
7 to forget about them.

8 And the last thing is that in terms
9 of I think in hindsight, you know, the
10 preparation, I know from the last presentation,
11 you were talking about you reach out, phone calls,
12 and knocking on doors, and... But somehow we're
13 still not reaching all the residents, right? So I
14 think this preparation thing needs to really go
15 all year 'round so every kind of information that
16 you send out, whether it's with the rent bill or
17 any kind of communication, that should have
18 something with the preparation, what people should
19 have a reminder. 'Cause one of my staff in my
20 district office, she lived through like five, six
21 hurricane when she was in Puerto Rico and she
22 really summed up a list for us in terms of what
23 people should have. You know, I mean, just
24 filling up your bathtub all the way to the top so
25 that you have water to flush your toilets and

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things like that. And I think it's just constant reminder that we just need to work with the resident.

And I think the elected official especially in lower Manhattan that represent the development down there, we work together very well and in terms of the languages, so we could really work on doing the preparation constantly. And then also having floor captains and the registry that we were talking about, I think that is really significant, even though it was--even if it's voluntary so we know if the seniors are there, if people who need help are there, and then we got to make sure that we bring help to them. And a lot of people want to help and volunteer, but we really need to kind of decentralize so it's not like a big thing, you know? Like every development, if we could work with the tenant leaders and get the volunteers together, get the resident to get--just to take care of people on your own floor and know that the community center could be their headquarters, you go down there, you can get equipment and supply, I think that will really help us build a stronger network and

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prepare for anything that happen in our development.

And I think that the support that are there for NYCHA, I mean we want to work with you to preserve these housing, these affordable housing, so work with us and really be open about it, and I think that will go a long way. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: We've been joined by Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito from Manhattan. Council Member Gonzalez.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I know the last time that we had the first part of the hearing, I did ask questions in reference to the list and I think it came up, I don't want to be redundant about the folks who need assistance that have some disability, some of the aging folks, and I think that you have said that they're going to update the list or that the list--because I know we were working with a list because I worked with your team, I was out there. And I also just want to say that you have the whole time I was there in Red Hook and I called you, you responded, so I

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want to thank you for that.

But moving forward in the aftermath of that, I'd like to know about the lists, but I also would like to know in the aftermath there is still some heating issues in some of the buildings. I was out there a couple of weeks ago in Mill Street, I believe it was, and I found out about it because there was something on the news about 6 o'clock in the evening on a family that had absolutely no heat and she was very ill, the woman. We managed to get some heaters, my staff and I, we went out there. So I know that it's not something, it's the aftermath or whatever, but is that something that you guys are working on? Is there, you know, work being done to the boilers, is there a new boiler? If you could respond, I certainly would appreciate it. And that's the Red Hook houses. Thank you.

CECIL HOUSE: So in Red Hook, we do have the mobile boilers there, they will be there for several months to go. As a result of that, we do periodically in that system, there are challenges with keeping that system sort of calibrated so that these new mobile boilers work

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2 effectively with the older equipment that's in
3 place. And so we do pay very close attention to
4 any calls coming in from residents in that
5 location to our call center or to our property
6 management office. It sounds like this was one
7 that may not have gotten caught as quickly.

8 Carlos, if you have any more details on that one,
9 that will be very helpful.

10 [Crosstalk]

11 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: The
12 infrastructure at Red Hook requires more than the
13 prior boiler. We establish what is called a 24-
14 hour watch, meaning that we have a person 24/7 on
15 site and what we do is through emergency services
16 through the call center, we responds to their
17 requests. We found a lot of--we're doing a lot of
18 work, but like the general manager said, the fact
19 that you have these equipments, it requires
20 special attention. But we have a 24-hour watch
21 and if--we've been respond--we monitor actually
22 many of the calls from all this locations with the
23 prior boiler.

24 CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, I mean, these
25 mobile boilers are going to be in place for

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probably most of this year, so if you hear of locations and they've called the call center and we are not there, because we should be able to get there fairly quickly--

JOHN RHEA: Yeah.

CECIL HOUSE: --with the staffing that we're putting in place, please let us know as quickly as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Okay.

Well I do know that it's an ongoing situation and this is why I will reach out to your office and I'll continue to work with you, but Red Hook houses, how many folks live there? Do you have numbers?

CECIL HOUSE: We do have numbers, I don't have them in front of me. Actually, I can add them up here.

NATALIE RIVERS: A little over 3,000.

[Crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: -- thousand.

CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, about 3,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: No,

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6,000.

JOHN RHEA: No, no, it's a little over 3,000 units.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Right, right, no--

JOHN RHEA: Yeah, right.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: --I'm talking about individual--

[Crosstalk]

JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] Yeah, it's over 6,500 people or so.

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Okay. Well I know there's a lot of issues there, as there are citywide, and I know that together, as Margaret Chin said, if there is anything that we could do as a Council and myself as a member in respect to giving support and partnering, we want to make those facilities and those places better for our folks.

And the other thing is I went out there during the evacuation period to warn people to leave, a lot of people did not want to leave, and I know that came up last time, but I just, again, would like to know what are the efforts to

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get these folks who are tenant leaders to understand the significance of leaving?

And I was out there with the police department with bullhorns, you guys were out there, everybody was out there, but a lot of people did not evacuate. So it was so serious and there were also medical issues with the facility that was there. I don't know if you're familiar with the medical facility there, Addabbo Medical Center. We had to get involved because they were about to start treating people with not a doctor, but some student or something, and we were concerned and we brought a team out from Luther Medical Center to assist. So I think that's another piece that maybe, I don't know if it's part of the housing, you tell me, you know, to have available a team of medical folks. There were a lot of people that were ill, there were people who are affected with a lot of trauma, as you know, and I thought some of them were going to have a heart attack over the fact that, you know, this was happening and they didn't evacuate. So I don't know if that's part of what you do, and if you could explain it, I would appreciate it.

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2 JOHN RHEA: Well first of all,
3 just, Council Member Gonzalez, I want to say thank
4 you for the calls that you placed to me directly
5 and to our staff--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Thank
7 you.

8 JOHN RHEA: --you know, right in
9 the middle of the activity and that you continue
10 to place subsequent to the storm about what's
11 happening in Red Hook particularly. Your support
12 and getting medical resources, you know, through
13 Addabbo, as well as where we stood up at the
14 Miccio Center through a lot of volunteers and
15 others because of you and other elected officials
16 in the area and folks with the Red Hook Initiative
17 played, you know, a major role in our ability to
18 respond to residents' needs. So thank you on
19 that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: And thank
21 you for responding each time.

22 JOHN RHEA: My job and my pleasure.
23 But before, or some earlier questions asked
24 similar, been very pointed, you know, is NYCHA
25 going to provide a set of services like the ones

1
2 you're describing and, you know, I've just been
3 very open in saying I think there needs to be a
4 lot of conversation about what's the--which
5 agency--and I'm not saying that's a sister city
6 agency, whether it's federal, state, whether it's
7 volunteers, we need to sit down and talk through
8 how do we ensure that the needs of residents are
9 being met in terms of tragedy, disaster, and
10 crises. We have limited resources, so part of
11 this is a funding issue, but part of this also is
12 kind of a mission issue, you know, what are we
13 well-placed to perform in terms of a set of
14 services versus some other agencies and other
15 organizations that that's what they do every day.
16 And then how we ensure that we have an operational
17 way to coordinate the activities if we're not
18 going to be the agency that's the principal
19 provider of those services.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Yeah, and
21 I just say that because in times like that,
22 everybody volunteers, people give with their
23 hearts, but there's also liability issues. You
24 know, I mean, you have a person step in to an
25 environment that's not a licensed physician and is

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2 treating people could definitely come back to not
3 just hurt the housing folks and all the folks that
4 are there, but the individual that's treated. So
5 I'm glad that I'm there--

6 JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] The first
7 rule of government, do no harm, right?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ:
9 Absolutely;

10 JOHN RHEA: And so--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ:
12 [Interposing] I'm glad that I was there in that
13 particular situation because I have to say Luther
14 Medical Center responded immediately with a team
15 of doctors to ensure that they would work closely
16 to make sure that that came up and that the
17 housing folks were supported, you know. So I
18 think that that's something we need to think
19 about. And, again, we here in the Council are
20 willing to understand that there's a possibility,
21 like Margaret Chin said, that we need to step to
22 the plate to assist you, okay?

23 JOHN RHEA: We appreciate that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Thank
25 you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. I
3 wanted to ask something, Margaret referred to
4 Smith Houses, and during Hurricane Irene, we were
5 told that there was a 90% evacuation rate, I don't
6 know if that was anecdotal, I don't know if that
7 was based on the people that we all knocked on the
8 doors that said they were leaving. Your plan
9 refers to a data warehouse Emergency Response
10 System, which is used to determine whether a
11 resident has evacuated. And so I want to know
12 where did we get that data for Irene, because now
13 in Sandy, we haven't been able to get any data as
14 to who evacuated and what the percentage was.
15 And--and I'm sorry that that's a lot of questions--
16 --I believe your plan says that you have to
17 document who lives, so was that done?

18 JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] So I just
19 want to take the very first part of your question,
20 which really was a query around Irene and the
21 estimate about, you know, what percentage of
22 families, individuals evacuated. That was
23 certainly an imprecise estimate and it was based
24 on a number of inputs, including inputs from
25 people such as yourself and from Council Member

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2 Chin, from the resident association leaders like
3 Ms. Torres and her team, as well as our staff on
4 the ground who were doing the door knocking, staff
5 at the developments. Unlike Sandy, you know,
6 staff was able to come back much faster than we
7 were able to have staff back in the developments
8 after Sandy, just given public transportation
9 wasn't out, the damage was less. And so we not
10 only knew who was getting on buses and who was
11 getting out of the developments on their own
12 volition and a lot of input and engagement with
13 resident leaders and other electeds, but we also
14 could see who was coming back in pretty real-time.
15 After Hurricane Irene, people pretty much came
16 back to the developments the following day and so
17 you could actually tell who was gone when they
18 weren't responding to the door knocking and who
19 was returning.

20 This time, obviously, very
21 different set of circumstances, you know power
22 outages for extensive period of times, blackouts,
23 things that didn't allow you to have the same
24 level of specificity around who left. But we know
25 for a fact, just given the number of people who

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chose to shelter in place, that it was substantially less and if we got 50% compliance, that would be a good number.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Ms. Rivers, did you want to add to that?

CECIL HOUSE: Well actually I was just going to respond on the ERS system. The system component, so this is one of those areas where our procedures didn't operate exactly as we had anticipated and there are lessons learned from the consequences on the ground of the storm. So we were able to use the Emergency Response System to develop reports and to provide us with data. But to take it further of being able to actually catalogue people that were evacuating, it wasn't as effective a tool as we had anticipated. I mean, you have people that--we have buildings with multiple exits, we have people that are leaving on the buses which is a little easier to track, we have people that are leaving in their own vehicles, that are leaving on foot, that are taking public transportation, they're leaving well before the storm, they're out, they're not coming back, so it becomes a little bit more difficult to

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track. So from tracking purposes, we need to rethink in order to get a good methodology whether we're going to be able to do that and what are the right tools to do that with.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And apartment logs, you're supposed to log apartments and was that done? I can't imagine how it could have been done--

CECIL HOUSE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --but just was it attempted to be done?

CECIL HOUSE: I think it's the same answer. I mean, you know, the same challenge in that area.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So on your plan, you said that you will look at the role of residents and elected officials in updating your hurricane plan. What do you think that process will be? How will you incorporate us and the residents?

CECIL HOUSE: I don't think we've fully worked it out, but I think through workshops. So we've got the survey process that we're working through with our family services

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2 group so we're going to get a series of feedback
3 there. We have been holding some meetings with
4 community-based organizations and in some of
5 those, we've agreed to continue that conversation
6 in workshops that actually will allow us to better
7 engage with them. On one hand, you know, we are a
8 service provider to some of those organizations,
9 and in other cases, they are service providers to
10 either us or our residents so we want to make sure
11 that we can coordinate those groups as much as we
12 can. And I think the conversations that we need
13 to have with the Council Members and their staff
14 on their input and the lessons that they learned
15 and the direction that they can give us would all
16 sort of play a part in pulling this plan together
17 in a very comprehensive way.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you tell
19 me what parts of the plan were not followed and
20 why?

21 MALE VOICE: Okay.

22 CECIL HOUSE: You got that,
23 Natalie?

24 NATALIE RIVERS: Yes. So there
25 were a couple of parts. As the general manager

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2 mentioned in terms of this ERS system, while we
3 had a repository of information, that was really
4 pulled from our tenant data system which provided
5 us with the information on our residents who
6 utilized life sustaining equipment, as well as
7 those that are mobility-impaired. So we had that
8 information, we were able to readily--

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
10 And that's aside from people who self-identified.

11 NATALIE RIVERS: These are the
12 individuals or the residents who self-identified--

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

14 NATALIE RIVERS: --and so we had
15 this information readily available to us and we
16 were immediately able to outreach to them.
17 However, as the general manager indicated, the
18 second phase in terms of the tracking of those
19 residents and inputting that information into the
20 repository or the Emergency Response System, it
21 didn't work well, so that we didn't do.

22 The other thing that we didn't do
23 which really worked to our advantage is the
24 procedure actually talks about moving, relocating
25 equipment so that it's readily available

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2 immediately following the storm. What we did, we
3 rethought that, we realized the enormity of the
4 storm early on, and we actually placed it away
5 from the evacuation zone, or Zone A, areas, and we
6 strategically placed it around the city so that it
7 would not be damaged and would be readily
8 available to us in post-storm recovery.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And what kind
10 of equipment are we talking about?

11 NATALIE RIVERS: You want to...

12 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We're talking
13 about, for example, generators, we're talking
14 about pumps, light towers, those kind of
15 equipment. If we follow the procedure that said
16 we needed to have them, for example, at Coney
17 Island, we could have lost them, right? We move
18 everything out to strategic location in order to
19 be redeployed.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: We're talking
21 about generators that can generate or provide
22 electricity for what, a room?

23 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Well we have--

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: A center, an
25 office, not a building, right?

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2 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --we have two
3 types, we have--the agency owns three generators
4 that can power a whole building and we have about
5 12, 13 that we can use, for example, to power the
6 pump that push water up to the water tank, to
7 maybe have one elevator working. But I just want
8 to remind everybody that in some of these
9 locations, the place which I will connect the
10 generator, the electrical panel was damaged by the
11 storm. That means that even though we might have
12 one piece of equipment, it will be a challenge.

13 And the pumps, we have pumps and
14 the size of the pump, the amount of water that you
15 can extract out of a room, and you saw, I remember
16 in the previous hearing, you went to one of our
17 boiler rooms, that boiler room was full of water.
18 You really need a extra large pump to--

19 [Crosstalk]

20 CECIL HOUSE: [Interposing] Another
21 one was phone service, so our plan says that we're
22 going to maintain phone service and, in fact, the
23 phones weren't working and so we couldn't do that,
24 so that's one thing that we didn't actually
25 execute. So we tried to back up as much as we

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2 could, you know, we beefed up our Long Island City
3 Center, but we weren't able to do some of those
4 practical things in locations that we--

5 [Crosstalk]

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
7 Whose phones weren't working, NYCHA's or the
8 residents' or both?

9 CECIL HOUSE: Well both. Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: The plan says
11 you're supposed to survey evacuation centers to
12 determine who from the developments have gone to
13 the evacuation centers, were you able to do that?

14 NATALIE RIVERS: So teams from our
15 community programs and development area, as well
16 as our leased housing areas, went to the various
17 evacuation centers surveyed, we were able to
18 identify a very small number of NYCHA residents,
19 but we did indeed do that.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And that was
21 how long after Sandy hit?

22 NATALIE RIVERS: Do we know the--
23 about a week after the storm.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: About a week
25 after.

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[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: What do you consider to be a small number? Just a range?

[Pause]

NATALIE RIVERS: Three.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: You identified three. And please identify yourself for the record.

DEIDRA GILLIARD: Hi, good afternoon, I'm Deidra Gilliard, I'm the vice president for Community Operations at the Housing Authority. We actually--I gave incorrect information--identified 50 NYCHA residents over the course of our visits to shelters, however, only three required referrals to our Family Services department. And in fact, one of those three was a resident who lived in a development where power was restored, however, he needed to be connected to his home attendant and we assisted with that.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Thank you.

MALE VOICE: Ask about the temporary hotels also. That might be different

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than the shelters.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Off mic]

temporary hotel?

MALE VOICE: Yeah.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Do you know
who was placed in a temporary hotel?

CECIL HOUSE: No, I--

[Crosstalk]

NATALIE RIVERS: --I don't know
that answer either.

[Pause]

CECIL HOUSE: I don't have that
information here, Council Member Mendez, we will
have to get that for you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In your
testimony, page five, you say that the updated
procedure called for NYCHA to, one, form pre and
post-inspection teams to ensure the safety of
residents and the soundness of our buildings. So
who were on those teams?

CECIL HOUSE: We had a combination
of NYCHA employees and contractors on those teams.
So it was depending on the, you know, what the

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need was and what the expertise was as to how we staff the teams.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And because there was no trains and subway service and bus service, how were staff deployed, like who couldn't travel, were they deployed to a development near them or were they deployed to their regular location site?

CECIL HOUSE: Carlos, do you want to--I mean, I can, but--

[Crosstalk]

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: [Interposing] We have the ones that we relocate to a fallback position location, we will have transportation, they will use the vehicles that we move out of the areas to go back. Some of them have their own transportation but we were onsite in all our properties as soon as it was safe to go out.

CECIL HOUSE: I also think there was a--in the conversations that I had with our staff, there was a lot of assistance that our staff was providing to each other, so there was some ride sharing that was going on. In some cases, we were able to send people to get critical

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resources and provide them with that kind of support. So it was a function of what the need was.

There were, in the early days, quite a few people that stayed in and around the development for a very long period of time.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: How long did it take--I'm assuming you deployed people from the non-impacted areas to help out 'cause you needed more hands on deck in the impacted areas, how longer after Sandy hit did that happen?

CECIL HOUSE: It was fairly immediate, correct? You want to--you did it.

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Almost immediately. Immediately.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Immediately. And that means Tuesday morning?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yeah, it means--
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[Crosstalk]

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: --safe to go out, we moved people to the field.

JOHN RHEA: And many NYCHA central office staff who couldn't report to 250 Broadway

1
2 and at 90 Church Street as a result of it being,
3 you know, affected and shut down with no power and
4 service, reported to developments.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Again,
6 on page five, and this would be the second part,
7 you say you established several non-Zone A sites
8 for staff to stay overnight during the storm in
9 order to more quickly respond the next day. How
10 did that work in an area maybe like Coney Island?
11 You know, how far away were they from the actual
12 developments in Coney Island and how easy was it
13 for them to transport back and get in there to
14 help out?

15 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I'm not really
16 good with directions.

17 JOHN RHEA: We're not confused,
18 we're just not sure we have the exact calculation
19 and the distance between Coney Island and the
20 Unity warehouse, so--

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
22 And which one?

23 JOHN RHEA: Unity.

24 [Crosstalk]

25 NATALIE RIVERS: Plaza.

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CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Unity. Plaza.

Okay. So they were staying in Unity and they commuted over to--

NATALIE RIVERS: [Interposing]

Coney Island.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

Whatever that distance may be.

NATALIE RIVERS: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So if I

had someone here from Brooklyn, they could--well

excuse me, I was from Brooklyn, Williamsburg

Houses, the other side of Brooklyn, right? So

okay. You also state here you developed pre-

approved communication templates for flyers in

multiple language to alert residents of

evacuations and other efforts. When was that done

and in what languages?

NATALIE RIVERS: So that was done

immediately following Hurricane Irene. We noticed

that it took us quite a bit of time to get

information out to our residents during Hurricane

Irene, so immediately after that storm, we began

to develop communications which spoke of eviction,

which spoke of the hurricane coming, and the four

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languages that we had this information available in English, Russian, Spanish, and Chinese.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. In one of the hearings, I'm assuming it was the Irene hearing, was it post-Irene?

MALE VOICE: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And the Sandy hearing?

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: But we were told, in one of the hearings we were told that NYCHA was going to make this available into nine languages.

MALE VOICE: That was right after Irene.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That was right after Irene. Was that done in nine languages and what were the nine languages that you were thinking of? No?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: That I don't know.

NATALIE RIVERS: We'll have to go back to that and we'll get back to you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Mr.

1
2 Laboy, in one of the hearings you talked about the
3 evacuation drills and that you were planning to
4 take these drills to all the developments in Zone
5 A and probably in Zone B. What developments were
6 you able to do evacuation drills besides the
7 Rockaways?

8 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: We through the
9 distribution we have, during the month of
10 September, we have--I'm trying to remember what
11 it's called--the emergency preparedness month in
12 which we encourage all the developments to go
13 through different safety trainings.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So for
15 emergency preparedness month, that's for the
16 residents as well as the employees?

17 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: For the staff
18 and the employees. We join other agencies, we do
19 work with the resident watch programs, we do the
20 preparedness, we do several activities that we can
21 provide information to you which ones we did.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: But you don't
23 have an evacuation drill for the actual residents
24 that they actually do.

25 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I don't recall

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if we did.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: No?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: I don't recall,
I need to find out, I don't know.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I had--

MALE VOICE: That's just at the
Rockaways?

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And was that
just in the Rockaways?

JOHN RHEA: You're referring to
when we did the preparedness training--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

JOHN RHEA: --that was in the
Rockaways, correct.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And that was
for the residents.

JOHN RHEA: That was for residents.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Right. And
there was a preparedness training, that wasn't an
evacuation drill with them at that point.

JOHN RHEA: We spent a lot of time
going through not only information around
preparedness but also on, you know, modes of

1
2 egress and, yeah, so there was some evacuation
3 work done around that, but that was just for the
4 Rockaways. That hasn't been done throughout
5 public housing.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Mr.
7 Chairman, this pre-dates you, it pre-dates me
8 being Councilwoman, in 2002, there was a
9 transformer fire at Con Edison, the residents of
10 Jacob Riis Houses and Northern Riis and the
11 residents of Campos Plaza were evacuated along
12 with the residents of a Mitchell-Lama and another
13 affordable housing building owned by the
14 archdiocese. At that time, the evacuation of
15 those buildings and how--it really differed and
16 the organization that were employed in those
17 different buildings. I had asked and I had gone
18 to tenant association meetings after I got elected
19 to ask residents to do drills because you never
20 know when Con Edison will explode again and in
21 fact, there was some hardships getting some people
22 out 'cause of the smoke in some of the buildings
23 in the Northern Riis area, so it's something I
24 really would like to work with the Authority on
25 and with my developments there.

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JOHN RHEA: Okay. We look forward to that.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. 'Cause I think the preparedness is important, but I also think we need to go and do some of these drills 'cause you just never know what's going to happen.

CECIL HOUSE: The drilling creates that muscle memory that lets people do it quickly, right?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

JOHN RHEA: I just wanted to add in as part of the work that we do with our seniors and with our floor captains, they do do incorporate evacuation training and preparedness into their activities. And obviously, our staff, Family Services staff and our Community Operations staffs worked with them on that.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. At the hearing following Hurricane Irene, NYCHA testified that it was working on a brochure describing different hurricane emergency procedures that were to be distributed to its residents and in different languages. Has NYCHA been able to do that?

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2 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Yeah, those are
3 the letters that we mentioned earlier, if you can--
4 -we have one here, the title is Hurricane
5 Instructions to Residents. You go through some
6 steps of what they should do, then once we--the
7 next one is evacuation instructions to the
8 residents.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can I see
10 that?

11 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Sure, you can--

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can I just
13 glance...? And that was distributed to the
14 residents in what manner?

15 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: This is part of
16 all the communication that we distribute to inform
17 the residents preview the storm--prior to the
18 storm.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And it was
20 distributed under the door, at a tenant
21 association meeting, in your newspaper, how was it
22 distributed to the residents?

23 CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: All of the
24 above, we even had this in our website.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And you

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have it in what languages?

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: The four languages that we mentioned before.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And we can get copies of that--

CARLOS LABOY-DIAZ: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --at some point? Thank you. For your national preparedness month in September, does every employee, every NYCHA employee attend that?

NATALIE RIVERS: So there are a variety of events that go on, so for example, this year we held safety fairs at various locations, there are drills that go on at each and every one of our developments. This year, for our central office staff, we held a tabletop exercise, there are evacuations and drills that go on at our corporate locations, our Long Island City facility, and our central contact centers in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn as well.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So not every employee is required to go to it? You know, us lawyers, we have to do what's called as continuing legal education in order to remain

1
2 licensed, do you have like these--are you making
3 your employees do these drills and these emergency
4 preparedness as part of their regular training
5 with all the other work that they have to do?

6 NATALIE RIVERS: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes. And they
8 have to take it every year like we do?

9 NATALIE RIVERS: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: You--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

12 [Interposing] So, Madam Chair, may I? So can--

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --you give
15 us a list of how many employees you've trained and
16 in what areas?

17 NATALIE RIVERS: We will provide
18 you with information on what we disseminate for
19 National Preparedness Month and let you see the
20 records of the employees who participate--

21 [Crosstalk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

23 [Interposing] Well just a report with numbers, we
24 don't want--

25 NATALIE RIVERS: Okay.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --to see
3 the list--

4 JOHN RHEA: Yeah, no--

5 NATALIE RIVERS: All right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: --I mean, I
7 shared with the general manager a thought the
8 other day that people do what you inspect, not
9 what you expect. So if it's required, then
10 what's--how do you follow up with employees that
11 are not complying, et cetera?

12 NATALIE RIVERS: Right, because
13 reports have to come back to us and we maintain
14 that information on what is happening.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In page seven
16 of the testimony, you say that you began opening
17 your Emergency Operations Center, can you tell us,
18 or at least the public, where the Emergency
19 Operation Center is located?

20 NATALIE RIVERS: Our Emergency
21 Operation Center is located in Long Island City
22 where we have the call center and our emergency
23 services department is housed.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And you
25 also had staff at OEM, is that correct?

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2 NATALIE RIVERS: Yes, and I can
3 personally attest to sitting at the OEM desk.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I can
5 personally attest to talking to you while you were
6 there. Okay. How many people did you have at
7 OEM? And I'm assuming you had staff there 24
8 hours, did they let you go home at any time, Ms.
9 Rivers?

10 NATALIE RIVERS: Occasionally.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yeah?

12 NATALIE RIVERS: Occasionally, to
13 take a shower and change clothes.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So but you had
15 more--it was more than just you, who--

16 NATALIE RIVERS: [Interposing]
17 Absolutely, we had around-the-clock coverage, we
18 had emergency services staff, as well as a senior
19 manager at all points throughout the storm.

20 CECIL HOUSE: Don't leave me out.

21 [Crosstalk]

22 JOHN RHEA: --too.

23 NATALIE RIVERS: Oh, the chairman
24 was there, the general manager was there, the EVP
25 for Operations, so we had--

1
2 JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] A minimum
3 of two at--

4 [Crosstalk]

5 NATALIE RIVERS: --a minimum of two
6 at all--

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

8 NATALIE RIVERS: --times.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And at the
10 Emergency Operation Center, who was usually there
11 in terms of senior higher level staff?

12 NATALIE RIVERS: So the general
13 manager actually lived at Long Island City, he is
14 our crisis manager and so he headed up our
15 operation. EVP Laboy spent a great deal of his
16 time there, we had representation from a variety
17 of departments from Emergency Services,
18 Communications, our Research and Planning area,
19 Finance, Procurement, and so on.

20 JOHN RHEA: All of the critical
21 functions necessary to respond to the hurricane
22 were represented at the Emergency Operation
23 Center.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And
25 I'll just take--before I say this is my last

1
2 question, let me just take one quick look. And,
3 my colleagues who are still here, do you have any
4 last questions?

5 [Long pause]

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I think
7 I can safely say this is going to be my last
8 question. So the committee staff has informed me
9 that we're still waiting for the supporting
10 appendixes and forms for the hurricane plan, that
11 we've not received that. And just wondering when
12 we can expect that.

13 NATALIE RIVERS: Yeah, we'll
14 provide that information to you today.

15 [Pause]

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
17 And, Council Member Chin, I see you looking at
18 your papers, any last questions?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: No, I mean,
20 the only point is when they were talking about
21 looking at the--surveying the evacuation center to
22 see how many NYCHA residents were there, I mean,
23 you said that you went there a week later. I
24 would really urge you to do that much, much
25 earlier, I mean, like the day before so you can

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2 have a better sense of how many people were
3 evacuated there and if there was any kind of
4 special needs. Because during Hurricane Sandy, I
5 was at Seward Park and there were NYCHA resident
6 who were coming on their own coming to the shelter
7 and most of them were seniors, and they, you know,
8 heard the knock on the door and they followed the
9 instruction and they evacuated and they got there
10 on their own, by walking and by public
11 transportation.

12 JOHN RHEA: Yeah, and we're not
13 suggesting that only 50 people at one point or
14 another actually made their way into an evacuation
15 center. You know, DHS obviously was taking census
16 and so there's information to suggest that other
17 NYCHA families sought shelter, but many may not
18 have been there at the time that we went and did
19 the census.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I know, if
21 DHS was doing the census, maybe you can find out
22 from them in terms of how many people actually did
23 take advantage and went to the shelter. And--

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
25 I would trust NYCHA's numbers before DHS at this

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point.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: But the other thing is that even with the shelters, I really think that NYCHA also really need to sort of have a bigger role in that. Is like the shelter that NYCHA resident go to, how to make sure that those shelter really are there help assisting the resident--

JOHN RHEA: [Interposing] So I--

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: --and providing the services. Yeah.

JOHN RHEA: --we do not want to leave you with the impression that we weren't intimately engaged with DHS, with Department of Education who provided the buses, with the NYPD to ensure that NYCHA residents knew that this transportation was available, the shelters were--

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: [Interposing] No, I know that, but the buses--

[Crosstalk]

JOHN RHEA: --the shelters were available, which--

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah.

JOHN RHEA: --which ones were

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2 closest to their developments. I went and visited
3 the shelters myself, you know, on the night as
4 people were checking in, so we were engaged and I
5 don't want you to think that. But the specific
6 question I thought that was asked was did we do
7 the census work per our emergency procedures, and
8 we did and that was done at a particular time and
9 that was the result of the census.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: But, yeah, so
11 you're saying that you actually can do it much
12 earlier to really see what the needs are.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So like in
14 Lavenburg Homes, my residents there were evacuated
15 to four different shelters, initially to one, then
16 to another, then to another, so by week--by the
17 first week when you might have--Lord knows where
18 they may have been at so it might have been hard
19 to track them. And some of them told me that they
20 just went elsewhere 'cause some of the situations
21 after they got transferred to certain shelters got
22 so dangerous that they feared being in the
23 shelter.

24 So well, Mr. Chairman, one of the
25 things I'm working at is identifying a person in

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2 every building, that a lot of the work that I was
3 able to do is that I had numbers for people so
4 those that I actually had on my cell phone, I was
5 able to contact 'cause, you know, our offices were
6 dark as well, and where we were able to do that,
7 we were able to get individuals in that building
8 to tell us what was going on and go there. Many
9 of these residents are telling me now, you can
10 have me as a contact, but the next storm, I'm out
11 of here, right? But even so for evacuation
12 purposes, maybe if their neighbors are knocking on
13 their door just to say that this emergency is
14 happening, I don't know if it might have a better
15 impact.

16 And also, if there is some line
17 where residents who may not want to tell their
18 neighbors they're evacuating because we've heard
19 stories of people's whose homes got broken into,
20 maybe they could at least place a phone call on
21 some secure NYCHA line where they can tell you,
22 yes, we're evacuating and we're going to this
23 shelter or going to a family member's home so at
24 least in like this last emergency, that's one less
25 door to knock on, or at least we know they're safe

1
2 even if we have to knock on that door again, at
3 least we know at some point that they are safe.

4 Okay?

5 JOHN RHEA: Appreciate that.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

7 I've been touting the use of tenant participation
8 funds to try to get people to do their go bags and
9 do this emergency preparedness and, certainly, I
10 think we need to use some of that money also for
11 strengthening tenant's associations, as you said
12 yesterday, Mr. Chairman, the differences that we
13 saw in different communities had to do with, one,
14 the strength of tenant associations in those
15 developments, and the strength of the not-for-
16 profits and how well they knew their communities,
17 and the elected officials and how we all worked
18 together. While it was very painful being through
19 the district and seeing what people were going
20 through, I knew we were getting help out to
21 people. And whenever I was able to escape to
22 someone's home that had heat and electricity and I
23 saw the TV, it was really sad to see what was
24 going on in other parts of the city. So just
25 trying to figure out ways that we can all work

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together.

I know for many of you and many of the staff, and something else I want to say, I had spoken to, when I was doing the tour, some of your staff people and I think, particularly people in the Rockaways who were working there and still working and just going out every day and doing their work, but I think that many of them have been traumatized and really don't even realize it 'cause they're just busy trying to get everyone powered up.

One last question, for real this time, how many of your developments still have mobile boilers and mobile generators?

[Background noise]

JOHN RHEA: --developments.

CECIL HOUSE: We have, it's 19 locations where we have mobile boilers.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So that's not-

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CECIL HOUSE: [Interposing] So the number of developments--

[Crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --19

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2 developments, that's 19 locations within various
3 developments.

4 [Pause]

5 CECIL HOUSE: --says it actually 19
6 developments.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Nineteen
8 developments that have mobile boilers and
9 generators or have the mobile boilers?

10 CECIL HOUSE: Yeah, so we have no
11 generators powering electricity in any of our
12 buildings, there are a few locations where we have
13 mobile generators powering the boilers, the mobile
14 boilers. In a day or two, we will not have any
15 generators powering mobile boilers, so we should
16 be completed with that transition this week.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And one
18 of the things I would like the Housing Authority
19 to provide to this committee is what would be the
20 capital dollars associated with putting a backup
21 generator and boilers in those permanently in
22 those senior buildings.

23 CECIL HOUSE: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So in a case
25 of emergency, those seniors can at least get on

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the elevator and have running water up into their apartments.

JOHN RHEA: We can do that, we've actually done that assessment so we should be able to provide that. You mean for the entire city or in the impacted areas?

CECIL HOUSE: Senior buildings.

JOHN RHEA: All senior buildings, the entire city.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing] All senior buildings. And, of course, if you could identify it 'cause as I go in and speak to my colleagues and the members--

JOHN RHEA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --the first ones is probably going to be a big dollar associated with that--

JOHN RHEA: Right.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --the first ones we'd want to take care of is the impacted area.

JOHN RHEA: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: But I'd want to know that for everything because a blackout

1
2 could happen at any time and those seniors will be
3 at risk. Okay.

4 JOHN RHEA: We can do that.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very
6 much. Ms. Rivers, how was this, your first
7 experience at the table?

8 NATALIE RIVERS: It was great,
9 Council Member, thank you--

10 [Crosstalk]

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
12 Come back more often. Mr. Chair, send her back
13 more often.

14 JOHN RHEA: Absolutely.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

16 JOHN RHEA: Absolutely.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you
18 everyone.

19 JOHN RHEA: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Now we will go
21 to the public testimony.

22 [Pause]

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And we
24 only have three, so if anyone wants to testify,
25 you can fill out the form and still get on a

1
2 panel. I'm going to ask Judith Goldiner from the
3 Legal Aid Society, you're going to come up and
4 have the table all by yourself because we didn't
5 get to you the last time and want to be able to
6 ask you--and thank you for these, thank you. And
7 in the next panel, we're going to have Nancy
8 Ortiz, the resident president of Vladeck Houses,
9 and we're going to have Kirby Desmarais, excuse me
10 if I'm pronouncing it wrong, one of the Red Hook
11 volunteers.

12 And anyone else who wants to
13 testify, you can still sign up to do so.

14 [Pause]

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Ms. Goldiner,
16 it's a pleasure to see you here today.

17 JUDITH GOLDINER: Always nice to
18 see you as well, Rosie, and we appreciate the
19 leadership you've shown on the public housing
20 issues.

21 So I'm going to apologize in
22 advance for my terrible cold and I will--hopefully
23 everyone can hear me. And I'm not going to repeat
24 what's in my testimony 'cause it's all there, but
25 I did want to raise the issues that we saw when we

1
2 were out, you know, we've been out at the
3 developments in Red Hook, Coney Island, and Far
4 Rockaway since the storm. And we've been in touch
5 with many, many public housing residents in the
6 impacted developments. We were also out in your
7 district as well, although was, you know,
8 completely impressed with the level of volunteer
9 efforts so we felt like we were less needed there
10 than we were in some other areas.

11 The Housing Authority's lists were
12 completely inadequate. I mean, they claim--first
13 of all, they told me that they had gone to see--
14 knocked on every single door after the storm and
15 that was not borne out by the people that we spoke
16 to, many of whom were seniors, many of whom lacked
17 medicine, lacked water, lacked food, and they had
18 not seen anyone from the City at all, let alone
19 the Housing Authority. Now I think the Housing
20 Authority had significant challenges after the
21 storm, but it was pretty clear to me that had they
22 called on other parts of city government, had they
23 coordinated lists--and this is true not just for
24 the Housing Authority, but the whole city. It's
25 like between all the city agencies, they know who

1
2 has home care, they know who is mobility-impaired,
3 they know who is getting services, they know who
4 is in a wheelchair. They have that information
5 whether or not, you know, they don't have to keep
6 it in such a way that it's publicly available, but
7 it's not like these are not knowable things for
8 them, they know who's a senior, they know who has
9 very young kids.

10 And that was a real failing because
11 you left people there and, were it not for
12 volunteers and were it not for their neighbors
13 especially, very bad things would have happened to
14 them, and the only reason they didn't was not
15 because either the Housing Authority or city
16 government stood up to the plate, but because, you
17 know, there was a tremendous volunteer outpouring.

18 You know, they certainly, for
19 example, some of the suggestions I think Council
20 Member Recchia raised, which is you know where you
21 have retrofitted apartments and you know where you
22 have seniors, why didn't you go to those
23 apartments, there was no good answer to that and
24 they did not go.

25 We're very interested in the

1
2 abatement issue, so to the extent that people
3 didn't get abatements, we spent a lot of time and
4 advocacy with the Housing Authority to try and get
5 abatements for people. If people didn't get them,
6 we want to know about it. We've talked to many
7 people, especially in the Rockaways, who did not
8 have services for far longer than their abatements
9 reflected and we're obviously very concerned about
10 that.

11 I also wanted to raise like Section
12 8. So for people on Section 8, right after the
13 storm, we told the Housing Authority there are all
14 the--you know, there are people who are going to
15 need transfers, you need to expedite that process,
16 and they told us well they better come in with
17 letters from landlords explaining why they don't
18 owe rent. And I said, you know what, they owe
19 November's rents because they're not in that
20 apartment right now and the idea that they're
21 going to get a letter from a landlord who may or
22 may not exist anymore saying whether they owe rent
23 or not is completely ridiculous and you just have
24 to give people Section 8 vouchers now. After a
25 few fights about that, they did agree to do it,

1
2 but were it not for our advocacy, I don't think
3 that would have happened and that's not a good
4 thing, obviously, for people who should have been
5 able to relocate.

6 There was a lot of talk, not so
7 much at this hearing but the last hearing, about
8 how residents did not relocate and they should
9 have. That is not clear to me that that was true.
10 So that it was true that people didn't leave to go
11 to the shelters, it was not clear that there was
12 enough shelter space for all those people, had
13 they relocated. And, you know, I think we could
14 do the numbers ourselves in our head and see that
15 the clearly the City did not have enough shelter
16 space if all the public housing--even just all the
17 public housing residents from the impacted areas
18 had evacuated, there would not have been enough
19 space for them. The space that was provided in
20 any event was grossly inadequate for many people,
21 especially people with special needs. You know,
22 the hearing that there was--we were at this
23 shelter hearing and at the shelter hearing, there
24 was a lot of testimony about how people who came
25 in wheelchairs were sent away from shelters

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2 because they could not--they said they could not
3 care for them and were sent back into the storm.
4 And people were understandably fearful that their
5 apartments would be looted if they had left, and,
6 you know, that was an issue in some places.

7 So I think the idea of blaming
8 people who decided based on their knowledge of
9 what the shelter system was like, based on the
10 fact that they didn't have other relatives who
11 could shelter them, and blaming them for staying
12 in place, I think is very misguided. And I think
13 we can count on the fact that when you have a
14 large number of poor people who are not likely to
15 have other resources that they can leave to and
16 you have a city who did not provide for shelter
17 that would accommodate, especially disabled and
18 elderly people, it is not too surprising that
19 people stayed where they were.

20 I'm happy to answer any questions
21 as well. There's much more information about what
22 we did in our testimony, but I won't belabor your
23 patience 'cause I know it's late.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

25 I'll certainly bring up the issue about the people

1
2 in the wheelchairs 'cause they should have been
3 sent to a medical shelter and unless all those
4 medical shelter spaces--

5 [Off mic]

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yeah. I did
7 get, during Irene, a lot of my residents into
8 medical shelters and this time didn't make my way
9 over there, so I don't know, but my colleague who
10 chairs the Committee on Health is telling me that
11 that was a disaster.

12 JUDITH GOLDINER: Yeah, it was, I
13 mean, they did not have space. I mean, really the
14 question to ask is how many residents were there
15 in Zone A buildings that got flooded, how many
16 people was that, and how many shelter spots did
17 you have for everyone. And you do the math, like
18 they knew that they--they couldn't possibly have
19 planned for people to evacuate, so since they
20 didn't plan for people to evacuate, what did they
21 plan for I think is a really important question.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And the people
23 in wheelchairs who were turned away, I'm assuming
24 that was prior to the storm hitting, is that
25 correct?

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JUDITH GOLDINER: No, I think people, you know, there were many people--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing] 'Cause I know a lot of people--

JUDITH GOLDINER: --there was both--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --were turned away after.

JUDITH GOLDINER: Well there both, right? So I am not saying that people were turned away in the middle of the storm, I'm not going to tell you that, but I know that people who had serious medical needs who showed up at shelters before and after the storm were turned away because they said the shelters could not accommodate them. So, for example, let's say you're in place and you, you know, you know, look, I can't be without electricity, like I got to get out somehow, people who we convinced to get out then had nowhere to go.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. I'd like to know, not now on the record but afterward, any specificity about who you know who haven't gotten the rent abatements because I'm

1
2 also having that issue with some of my residents.
3 And for those buildings and developments, if you
4 happen to know which ones were not door knocked,
5 'cause, again, I had both extremes in developments
6 across from each other and so I want to bring that
7 information back to the Authority so that they
8 could inquire 'cause they're under the belief that
9 every door was knocked on by their staff, so I
10 want to go--

11 JUDITH GOLDINER: [Interposing] I
12 mean, I know that was done before the storm, we
13 just got a lot of complaints after the storm. The
14 Authority told me that it--they told me the same
15 thing, they told me that every door was knocked on
16 after the storm, but the number of complaints I
17 got from people who were homebound who said they
18 never got a knock. Now I'm not saying they all
19 were right, maybe they didn't hear it, maybe they
20 were asleep, but it wasn't just a couple of people
21 who told me that, so that makes it a little hard
22 for me to believe that really people were
23 outreached to in that way.

24 [Pause]

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Anyone? No

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2 more questions? No?

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JUDITH GOLDINER: [Interposing] The

last thing I wanted to raise is mold, which

continue--the mold remediation continues to be a

huge issue especially in the Sandy developments.

You know, we've been hearing lots and lots of

complaints about workers going in with buckets of

bleach, which is not going to work to deal with

the mold, and we remain very concerned that

there's not a really good plan or protocol to take

care the mold problems that we saw--you know, this

was especially true in the first floor apartments

that flooded, but not remediating them properly

means that it's going further up and that's a

concern for us.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And if you can

provide me with the details of which developments

those are so I could take that back to the Housing

Authority?

JUDITH GOLDINER: We'd be happy to

do that.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Because I

believe, from someone shaking their head, that

that's not the procedure that's supposed to be

1
2 utilized by their workers, so they need to know
3 where that's happening.

4 JUDITH GOLDINER: Yep.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay?

6 JUDITH GOLDINER: Okay. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you so
8 very much. Okay. Nancy Ortiz, come on up. And
9 is Kirby Desmarais...? Come on up.

10 [Long pause]

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Whoever's
12 ready. Okay. Okay. Is it on?

13 KIRBY DESMARAIS: There we go.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: There we go.

15 KIRBY DESMARAIS: Thank you for
16 letting me represent--I'm sitting here today
17 representing eight people in Red Hook who were the
18 first responders on the ground the day after the
19 storm. They came from all over the country, a few
20 people came from Michigan, myself, I'm actually a
21 resident of Red Hook for five years, and we
22 responded immediately after the storm had come
23 through.

24 A few clarifying facts after
25 setting and listening to this session. There are

1
2 16,000 residents in Red Hook as a whole, not just
3 the public housing sector area, there are 3,000
4 residents on the other side of the neighborhood
5 that are not within the public housing.

6 An immediate need, what it really
7 comes down to is people just showing up. I've
8 heard NYCHA say many times to many different
9 organizations, they have said it right in front of
10 me, you don't have eyes everywhere, you don't
11 know. Those first two weekends, we dispatched
12 4,000 volunteers, we had 4,000 sets of boots on
13 the ground, we were everywhere in Red Hook, it is
14 not a large community. We went within 48 hours of
15 having one pot of soup on a stove to feeding over
16 1,000 hot meals a day. We got our hands within
17 the first three days on the list from NYCHA that's
18 supposed to be so confidential that said Red Hook
19 had 98 homebound residents, there are 210, which
20 is now 208 because we are continuing our relief
21 work even within storm prep for Nemo that just
22 passed through. We're very actively involved with
23 our case management and keeping that up, and I do
24 not understand why NYCHA has not caught up to us
25 yet, three months later.

1
2 Another response is NYCHA has not
3 communicated with our group. It was very clear
4 through whether you picked up the New York Times
5 or whether you walked through Red Hook that first
6 three-week period, where the relief work was
7 happening. The disaster center did not open up
8 until week four, the disaster relief center with
9 all the federal agencies. We were working through
10 RHI, Cavalry Church, Visitation Church, there were
11 very, very specific point people that were
12 coordinating this relief effort. If anybody came
13 in and asked to be directed, they would have been
14 directed.

15 We have open lines of communication
16 with all of the residents that we helped, whether
17 they're in public housing or not. I can very
18 confidently say sitting in front of you now, they
19 did not knock on those doors for 12 days. Twelve
20 days.

21 My biggest concern now is the lack
22 of communication. We are continuing our relief
23 work, we have an established database with over
24 2,000 locations on it, both NYCHA and not NYCHA.
25 We have FEMA, we have Red Cross, we have all these

1
2 large agencies coming to us for our data, yet the
3 one local agency that we essentially stepped in
4 and did the work for, has not come to us for one
5 little bit of our data. They have not reached out
6 to us, they have not extended a hand. That is a
7 huge concern for me if they are saying that they
8 are putting together a report to handle this
9 later.

10 There was a flood advisory for Red
11 Hook during Nemo, we were on watch 24 hours a day
12 with an active hotline for two days. We had two
13 private residence, and there was actually one
14 NYCHA building that flooded from Nemo, it was an
15 isolated incident. It was not a NYCHA staff
16 member that found this, it was a person that we
17 work with closely within the community that
18 actually took it upon themselves to tour these
19 basements and see pre-storm what was happening.

20 We could have another storm or
21 another flood in Red Hook, we are so, so not
22 stable with the water--the way the water flows
23 underneath our community. This could happen next
24 month again. Nemo was in--it came, it was another
25 storm came within three months during high tide

1
2 and we're lucky that it didn't hurt us. But I'm
3 really concerned to see that we have not learned
4 our lesson yet and NYCHA has not learned their
5 lesson yet to mobilize because we had another
6 opportunity happen already and we didn't see
7 anything.

8 So I have a lot of data. I'd also
9 like to clear the record on what happened with the
10 Addabbo clinic. The Addabbo clinic did not have a
11 medical student working under their walls. We
12 opened a mobile clinic within Red Hook Initiative,
13 we were treating hundreds of people because there
14 was no medical services available in the
15 community. For almost two weeks, we begged all
16 the way up to a federal level to have mobile
17 clinics, to have doctors come out and coordinate.
18 The medical student is Matt Kushner [phonetic], he
19 is a hero, he treated hundreds of people and
20 helped hundreds of people because nobody else
21 came. We were begging, begging. He didn't want
22 to be doing this, he was working 18-hour shifts
23 for two weeks to do this.

24 And I'd also like to correct the
25 record that it was not Lutheran Hospital that was

1
2 brought out, it was NYU Hospital that got brought
3 out. We literally had to call Addabbo clinic and
4 threaten a press conference on them so that they
5 would open because they had abandoned their
6 community. I physically went down with 20
7 volunteers, we cleaned that center out, we got
8 generators in there, we got heaters in there.
9 We've got them \$1 million worth of medical
10 supplies so that they could reopen just so the
11 next day the doctors could walk out because they
12 were cold and leave the center open. That is when
13 we reached out to NYU. Matt himself reached out
14 to NYU for support because the local government
15 and the federal government did not provide medical
16 care and a individual team of NYU doctors walked
17 and came--they came out to take the liability and
18 the work off of Matt at that time.

19 So there's a lot of things that I'm
20 hearing here that are not truthful because there's
21 not a lot of people that were on the ground for a
22 lot of time.

23 So, yeah, we as a group, now that
24 we are more organized because we're still in the
25 middle of the relief work but we have more time

1
2 available now, we are more willing to provide a
3 report on Red Hook with our data that we have.
4 All of our data is daily up-to-date. Whatever
5 this Council would need because the real story and
6 the real miracles of Red Hook need to be told from
7 the people who were on the ground doing it.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you, we
9 look forward to getting that information. So you
10 signed up as a Red Hook volunteer--

11 KIRBY DESMARAIS: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --but then you
13 mentioned the Red Hook Initiative, so you were
14 just volunteers working together and then you
15 worked with Red Hook Initiative or you're separate
16 and apart or--

17 KIRBY DESMARAIS: [Interposing] It
18 was a partnership, we walked in, they were one of
19 the two buildings in the community that still had
20 all of their utilities. They opened their space
21 up. We very quickly outgrew that space and we had
22 to shift the kitchen services into a church across
23 the street. We opened a independent warehouse to
24 house all of the goods and the donations, and kind
25 of donations that came in, we filled an entire

1
2 warehouse in three days full of donations of
3 everything that the community needed.

4 The Red Hook Initiative--

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
6 So your organization is the Red Hook--

7 KIRBY DESMARAIS: [Interposing] Is
8 the Red Hook Volunteers, we're now officially
9 filed for a 501(c)(3) so that we can continue this
10 relief work 'cause it's looking about it's going
11 to be about a year of work to get the neighborhood
12 back to where it was before.

13 Red Hook Initiative has not done
14 any relief work since November 13th.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

16 KIRBY DESMARAIS: And we've moved
17 out of that space and we now have our own space
18 along Van Brunt [phonetic].

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. All
20 right. Well thank you for everything that you and
21 the other volunteers did during the storm and for
22 coming here today. And any additional information
23 you want to submit to this committee, we'd love to
24 have it and read it and share it with the other
25 committees of the City Council if it's not

1
2 appropriate for this committee 'cause this
3 committee is just public housing, but as you see,
4 we have many hats here. So--

5 KIRBY DESMARAIS: [Interposing] We
6 can get you a full report on everything down from
7 the medical care that deeply involved the NYCHA
8 residents and also for future planning
9 recommendations too.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Great, thank
11 you. My colleagues, any questions? No? Okay.
12 Ms. Ortiz.

13 NANCY ORTIZ: Good afternoon
14 everyone. Thank you, Madam Chair. I testified
15 before and I don't want to be repetitive, so I'll
16 just get basically down to the real quickness so
17 that we can all get out of here.

18 Despite its disaster relief
19 protocols, NYCHA did fail to establish a logical
20 chain of command for communicating and
21 disseminating information. There was no single
22 point of contact and there was very little direct
23 communication with the residents about disaster
24 relief efforts. NYCHA needs to establish a
25 specific chain of command in their plan for

1
2 developing, executing, and disseminating
3 information relative to disaster response and
4 relief protocols, which is why OEM is a command
5 center for all city agency, not Long Island City.

6 NYCHA must designate a point person
7 to coordinate all disaster relief efforts and
8 provide direct information regarding relevant
9 protocols to resident at the property levels.

10 In addition, their newly-created
11 quality assurance department should have gone out
12 in the field and strongly encouraged, recruit, and
13 train residents and staff to assist in the
14 disaster relief efforts. CERT training, CPR, and
15 first aid.

16 Vladeck is attempting to get
17 individual captains for each building and get them
18 CERT trained. I start CERT training this month
19 and I am encouraging other residents to do the
20 same.

21 NYCHA did not properly follow its
22 own guidelines for notifying residents and local
23 advocates about how to prepare for the impending
24 hurricane. If possible, they needed to provide
25 materials to residents informing them of the

1
2 preparation and evacuation protocols in advance of
3 a natural disaster, not the day before. This
4 information must have been available on demand and
5 provided directly to residents. If possible prior
6 to the disaster, available in multiple language.
7 Public housing authorities must inform residents
8 of their rights and responsibilities in the cases
9 of natural disasters, including those relative to
10 evictions, basic human needs assistance, utility
11 and building restorations, relocation, and
12 supportive services. The mold issues are not
13 being properly addressed.

14 I have gotten numerous complaints
15 from other developments relative to the mold
16 issues.

17 NYCHA required residents to make
18 their rent payments on units that were
19 uninhabitable and lacked utilities for extended
20 period of times. The rent abatements were not
21 announced until two months following the
22 hurricane. Those abatements were not given to
23 residents until January 2013. They were told to
24 consider that an early Christmas present.

25 About three months after the

1
2 hurricane, the rent abatements to affected public
3 housing developments should have immediately
4 followed after the disaster, however, please note
5 many residents did not qualify for SAPO or FEMA.
6 A lot of the working residents who lost a lot of
7 food and has sustained an enormous amount of
8 damage and received no relief. They didn't even
9 qualify for food stamps.

10 While NYCHA was quick to assess the
11 hurricane's damage to public housing buildings
12 over the summer, all equipment and inventory was
13 removed from every development. Where the
14 inventory is to each development, no one knows,
15 which is why it failed to effectively coordinate
16 its contractors and equipment in a timely manner--
17 they were busy looking for it. This led to week-
18 long delays of utility restoration to many public
19 housing buildings.

20 Furthermore, the contractors sent
21 to address the mold removals were not properly
22 trained, they just grabbed the first set of
23 volunteers they were able to get. The mold
24 returned in several public housing units after
25 numerous treatment. This section requires a

1
2 proper protocol on vetted, approved, and qualified
3 professional contractors and execute service
4 contracts as soon as an impending natural disaster
5 is announced.

6 Staff or trained contractors must
7 be available and dispatched within 24 hours to
8 each development and evaluate the damages to the
9 property to determine the necessary repairs and
10 rehabilitation. NYCHA should prioritize and
11 immediately restore any critical utilities like
12 gas, water, heat, HVAC, sewage, and elevators, and
13 eliminate any exigent health and safety hazards,
14 including mold and mildew.

15 NYCHA should also implement during
16 emergency situations support staff from other non-
17 affected developments which shall include staff in
18 to borough offices--90 Church and 250--including
19 Long Island City to utilize a rotational shift
20 pattern in 12-hour increments to assist the
21 developments that are affected. We had staff
22 sleeping in our developments throughout the entire
23 time because they could not get home, they were
24 not allowed to leave to go home. How does someone
25 work efficiently if they are not getting any rest?

1
2 It's impossible. My manager was going out every
3 45 minutes to check on a life sustaining equipment
4 resident that I have in my development to ensure
5 that resident was okay.

6 I can go on. At the end of the
7 day, they failed. They failed immensely in every
8 sense of the word. I don't know what operating
9 plan they were looking at, but it sure didn't
10 work. That's just my opinion.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
12 And Nancy and I have had various conversations,
13 she's one of my tenant presidents, so anyone has
14 any questions.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I do.
16 Nancy, thank you for your testimony. And Mr.
17 Laboy indicated that there was communication with
18 the residents in the zone areas that we expected
19 to have a problem, referenced letters or flyers or
20 information that was disseminated to residents in
21 four languages. We haven't gotten copies, but we
22 will. So, no, I--is this familiar to you at--

23 NANCY ORTIZ: [Interposing] No, I
24 tend to disagree. We received nothing in my
25 development and we didn't see anyone. NYPD came

1
2 door knocking on November 2nd at about 1 p.m. to
3 tell us where the shelters were located. On
4 November 3rd, Family Services showed up to check
5 on the seniors that were affected.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So but I'm--
7 and someone could correct me--I believe their
8 testimony was that they first knocked in all of
9 the Zone A buildings, and actually Vladeck is not
10 Zone A.

11 NANCY ORTIZ: Zone B.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: It's Zone B.
13 And that afterward, after the hurricane, that they
14 went and door knocked on everything in the
15 impacted area. So you probably wouldn't have
16 gotten this in your building--

17 NANCY ORTIZ: [Interposing] We did
18 not.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And you did
20 not. But after Sandy hit and then you were all in
21 the blackout, did any NYCHA individuals come and
22 when did they come?

23 NANCY ORTIZ: As I stated, November
24 2nd NYPD came knocking after 12 o'clock, and on
25 November 3rd is when Family Services showed up.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: That's four
3 days late, four days later?

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Four days
5 after the...

6 NANCY ORTIZ: Four and five.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Four and five,
8 right, four and five days after. So and thank you
9 for everything you did. We have many stories so...
10 But anyway, and I won't embarrass you by saying
11 how hard you worked and how kind you were so...
12 Unless you want me to. No? Okay, then we won't.
13 All right. You're much appreciated.

14 NANCY ORTIZ: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

16 NANCY ORTIZ: No, your work is
17 appreciated, ma'am.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So we try,
19 it's a group thing, we couldn't have done what we
20 did alone. So thank you. And I know we still
21 have to have more discussions because there's
22 layers and layers upon things and information and
23 things that happened. And I do want to go back to
24 the Authority 'cause I want to be clear on what
25 they're saying and what they really believe

1
2 because it may be some employee who is reporting
3 back and they have some misinformation, or if it's
4 just that they're, you know, I'm not quite sure
5 where they're--they're giving us information, I'm
6 not quite sure how they're verifying that
7 information so--

8 NANCY ORTIZ: [Interposing] I would
9 just like to point out that relative to drills
10 that they mentioned that they had at developments,
11 I've never seen a drill at Vladeck Houses and I've
12 been there 33 years.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: For their
14 staff?

15 NANCY ORTIZ: Yes. Pamphlets,
16 again, I said they weren't disseminated. Office
17 of Emergency Management is usually manned by two
18 people within 12-hour shifts, that is the norm,
19 that's the policy--

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
21 That's the problem, it's--

22 NANCY ORTIZ: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --manned, it
24 should be womaned. Anyway, I'm sorry, it's
25 getting late.

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NANCY ORTIZ: And I just wanted to say that we--

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CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing] 'Cause it's almost all women here at this point anyway--

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NANCY ORTIZ: --we are establishing a penetrating to HUD and to Congress to implement an oversight committee on the emergency operating plans of NYCHA and we want to ensure that they followed their own procedures and have IG oversee this and give us back their findings. I believe there's a lot of miscommunication and a lot of falsenesses and a lot of testimonies being provided.

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Okay. All right, this meeting-- anything else? That's it? Okay. Thank you, this

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meeting is over.

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[Gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tammy Wittman, 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 *Tammy Wittman*

Date March 5, 2013