

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

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January 26, 2021
Start: 1:06 p.m.
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 3)

B E F O R E: Joseph Borelli
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Justin Brannan
Fernando Cabrera
Chaim Deutsch
Alan Maisel
Laurie Cumbo
Mark Levine
Jumaane Williams

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

Jake Cooper, Deputy Commissioner
New York City Emergency Management

Johanna Conroy, Assistant Commissioner
for Interagency Operations
New York City Emergency Management

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: PC recording is
3 underway.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon,
5 everyone, and welcome to today's remote New York City
6 Council hearing on the Committee on Fire and
7 Emergency Management. At this time, would all
8 panelists please turn on their video for
9 verification? To minimize disruption, please place
10 all electronic devices on vibrate or silent mode. If
11 you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is
13 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
14 cooperation. Chair Borelli, we ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Good morning. It
16 is my pleasure to gavel in--

17 [gavel]

18 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: the meeting of
19 January 26th, 2021 of the Committee on Fire and
20 Emergency Management. I am Council member Joe
21 Borelli and I am the Chair of this committee. I am
22 joined by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and my
23 colleagues, Council members Maisel, Brannan, and
24 Cabrera I see thus far. I will look once again.
25 Okay. That's all I see. Today, the Committee on

2 Fire and Emergency Management will be conducting an
3 oversight hearing on New York City's emergency
4 planning as well as hearing a number of bills that
5 are specific to the city's planning for and
6 responding to emergencies. New York City's emergency
7 management has historically and continues to do so,
8 an excellent job responding promptly to numerous
9 types of emergency as well as coordinating with other
10 city agencies to ensure the safety of all New
11 Yorkers. I want to shout out our Commissioner-- or
12 perhaps she is the former Commissioner-- I'm not
13 sure she is resigned yet. But Commissioner Creswell
14 who was just appointed to run FEMA and that is
15 something we are all proud of and certainly is a
16 testament to what I just said about New York City be
17 the gold standard of emergency management. With
18 regard to today's oversight portion of the hearing,
19 we are interested in examining the process by which
20 NYCEM plans for and responds to large-scale
21 emergencies. Specifically, we would like to examine
22 how New York City EM communicates and coordinates
23 with other city agencies, including during
24 preplanning stages and the actions taken during
25 impending disasters. Furthermore, we would like to

2 discuss the city's communication with the public
3 prior to, during, and after emergencies and disaster.

4 In addition to the oversight portion, then we have
5 five bills being heard today. New York City Public
6 Advocate Jumaane Williams is the prime sponsor of
7 Intros 1987 and 2057. Intro 1987 would establish a
8 task force responsible for reviewing emergency plans
9 of each city agency and issuing annual reports on the
10 recommended changes to such plans addressing
11 potential deficits, as identified by the task force.

12 Intro 2057 would require NYCEM, in consultation with
13 the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and the Department
14 of Education, to develop a plan to provide students
15 with breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the event that
16 schools are ordered closed or when any form of remote
17 learning is being used by the DOE. We will also hear

18 Intro 849, Intro by Council member Levine. Intro 849
19 would create an interagency task force to examine the
20 city's effort to provide assistance and services to
21 individuals relocating to New York City after being
22 displaced by a natural disaster event somewhere else.

23 Intro 1949, introduced by Council member Cumbo, would
24 require New York City Emergency Management to ensure
25 that periodic review of all plans guiding the city's

2 response to and ensuring the continuity of agency
3 operations during emergency circumstances.

4 Representatives from all relevant city agencies would
5 be required to participate in this review. And,
6 finally, Intro 2088, introduced by Council member
7 Cabrera, would require the New York City Emergency
8 Management to submit an annual report to the Council
9 describing the city's preparation for and in response
10 to the public health emergencies. I'm looking
11 forward to hearing the administration's testimony on
12 this general oversight topic and specifically on
13 these bills and I am first going to first turn over
14 the microphone to our friend, Public Advocate
15 Williams, for his opening remarks on these two bills.

16 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so
17 much, Mr. Chair. As was mentioned, my name is
18 Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate for the city of New
19 York. Thank you, Chair Borelli, for holding this
20 hearing today. The best time to prepare for a crisis
21 is actually probably yesterday. A lot can be said
22 about the city's preparations and responses during
23 the pandemic. But as was mentioned, there have been
24 good jobs at negotiating other emergencies in the
25 past, not so much in the pandemic. The mistakes made

2 amid the early days were significant and it caused
3 confusion and worry among New Yorkers. My office
4 received several calls and messages from constituents
5 on various issues such as where to obtain food in the
6 status of schools. Frankly, we could have. We have
7 the time to and should have done better. That is why
8 am very proud to introduce these two bills being
9 heard today to make sure we do better in future
10 crises. We must ensure the mistakes from last year
11 do not repeat itself. Unfortunately, I see some of
12 the same mistakes repeating themselves currently.
13 That's maybe another topic for another discussion.
14 New Yorkers do not have time to wait. These bills,
15 along with the many others being heard today, codify
16 an immediate response for whenever a crisis or state
17 of emergency occurs. The first bill, Intro number
18 1987 will create a state of emergency response and
19 recovery task force. It becomes active during any
20 state of emergency either by the Mayor or by the
21 Governor. This task force reviews the city's
22 emergency plans and recommends policy proposals, if
23 needed. A report is issued after the revision of the
24 city's plan. The Public Advocate, the Mayor, and the
25 Speaker appoint members to the task force. And is

1 evident that the city did not adequately prepare for
2 a pandemic, a criticism that can be directed for the
3 entire country, in fact. We must review what went
4 wrong, what we missed, and how we can prepare ahead
5 of another possible pandemic or disaster. In our
6 city deserves better and I anticipate this bill will
7 help. The second bill, Intro number 2057 will create
8 an emergency food plan for students. Specifically,
9 the Office of Emergency Management, Mayor's Office of
10 Food Policy, and Department of Education full must
11 create a plan to serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner
12 to students whenever schools are closed or remote
13 learning is used. All three agencies must provide
14 specific plans such as how to notify the public on
15 locations to pick up the food. Food insecurity is a
16 serious problem within our city and it is one of the
17 things that have been made worse during this
18 pandemic. A few months before the pandemic, a 2019
19 report by Hunger Free America found that one in eight
20 New Yorkers, about 1 million, were food insecure.
21 That was before the pandemic. Undoubtedly, that
22 number is much worse because of the pandemic in our
23 students are a part of that number. Students may
24 rely on schools for a meal because there's not enough
25

1 food at home. But when schools are closed, where
2 would they go? That question remained a major
3 concern during the early days of the crisis and any
4 time the Mayor needs to consider closure, whether
5 that be for inclement weather or natural disaster,
6 students suffering from constant hunger is a serious
7 problem. How can we expect students to concentrate
8 at home and, in some cases, without Internet access,
9 let alone without food. These students will be set
10 up for failure without help. This is especially true
11 for homeless students who lack both the stable
12 housing and food insecurity. At least 116,000 New
13 York City students or, better, one in 10 of our
14 students experience homelessness. That is a crisis
15 within a crisis. This bill would mean the city
16 provides meals to the public that are accessible to
17 anyone who needs it during the crisis or remote
18 learning. We must not leave and cannot leave our
19 students, typically those who are homeless and of
20 more color, behind. The bills before the committee
21 today are intended to be proactive measures in the
22 face of a crisis. New Yorkers deserve immediate
23 answers. Instead, what we saw and heard was a wait
24 and see approach, often confusing conflicting
25

2 messages. This cannot be the standard in the future
3 and I'm glad to see the Council members introduce
4 solutions to ensure that the government works for the
5 people who elected us. I want to thank the Speaker,
6 as well, and the Council for the leadership that they
7 showed during this time. In general, the intention
8 of these bills in front of the committee today is
9 having New York City prepared, whether there's
10 another pandemic or natural disaster. New Yorkers
11 need assistance and assurances of leadership. Again
12 I think the Chair for allowing me to speak. I look
13 forward to the testimony today.

14 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you. We have
15 also been joined by Council member Chaim Deutsch, who
16 is representing Brooklyn. Next, we will hear from
17 Council member and the Chair of our Health Committee,
18 Mark Levine, to discuss his bill.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you very
20 much, Mr. Chairman, and great to see the Public
21 Advocate here fighting on these critical issues.
22 Thank you, Mr. Public Advocate. I want to speak on
23 Intro 849 which would require the city to develop a
24 system for managing the arrival of refugees to New
25 York City after a natural disaster in another part of

2 the country or world. This is not a hypothetical.
3 This occurred in 2017 when hurricane Maria said
4 thousands of refugees off the island of Puerto Rico,
5 many of whom arrived here in our city because of
6 strong historical and family ties. And we learned
7 the hard way that we weren't prepared to support them
8 as a city. We relied too heavily on the federal
9 government which failed to approve many of their
10 applications for assistance or cut them off from
11 assistance to quickly and it was pretty clear that
12 these refugees needed not just connection to housing,
13 to food assistance, to a variety of social services,
14 legal assistance, and more. So, our bill, Intro 849
15 would require the creation of a task force composed
16 of representatives of the relevant city agencies to
17 prepare management plan so that the next time
18 refugees arrived here to our city, we are prepared
19 and, in the era of climate change, I am afraid we
20 should assume that this will be only to frequent.
21 So, thank you, Mr. Chair, for hearing this bill
22 today. Very much appreciate this opportunity to push
23 this legislation forward. Thank you. Back to you.

24 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you, Council
25 member Levine. Next, we have our friend from the

2 Bronx, Council member Fernando Cabrera to talk about
3 his bill.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
5 much. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and thank you for
6 your leadership and for allowing us to speak on these
7 bills and also to the members of the committee.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to speak on my bill,
9 Intro 2088. We were caught off guard by the Covid 19
10 pandemic and the impact of being unprepared is wide-
11 ranging and long term, not just in terms of public
12 health, but in our economy, our children's education
13 and future, numerous industries and entire future and
14 character of New York City. The city needs to be
15 prepared for the future emergencies, including
16 pandemics and to know where our weaknesses exist in
17 healthcare delivery and related emergency systems.
18 Intro 2088 will require the Commissioner of the New
19 York City Emergency Management to submit an annual
20 report to the Council describing the city's
21 preparation for and respond to any state disaster
22 emergency or local state of emergency related to an
23 infectious disease that affects the city's public
24 health. The report would include a description of
25 any actions taken in preparation for, Doering, and

2 immediately after the incident by or on behalf of the
3 city. A list of all city agencies, offices, or
4 private entities that were involved in the city's
5 emergency response and a description of the
6 distributor's current public health care workforce
7 and ways to improve medical search capacity and
8 guidelines for notifying and communicating with the
9 public and city officials during a local public
10 health emergency. With that, I'll turn it back to
11 you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much.

12 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you. Correct
13 me if I am wrong. I do not see a Majority Leader
14 Cumbo. If that is the case, we will proceed. Okay.
15 I will turn this over to Josh Kingsley, the Council
16 to the Committee on Firing Emergency Management who
17 will recite some things that he probably recites in
18 his sleep by now. Josh, thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Thank you, Council
20 member Borelli. I'm Josh Kingsley. I'm counsel to
21 the Fire and Emergency Management Committee of the
22 New York City Council. I don't have this recited to
23 memory yet. Apologies, Council member. Before we
24 begin testimony, I want to remind everyone who will
25 be testifying that you will be on mute until you are

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2 called to testify. Afterwards, you will be on muted
3 by the host. I will be calling on panelists to
4 testify. Please listen for your name to be called. I
5 will periodically be announcing who is the next
6 panelist--

7 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Wait. Josh, can we
8 pause for a second?

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: I see Majority
11 Leader Cumbo, so I want to give her the opportunity
12 to join us and speak a bit about her bill. Majority
13 Leader?

14 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you so much.
15 I appreciate the opportunity to be here. I thank you
16 so much, Council member Borelli, for opening the
17 discussion to me at this time. If you could just
18 give me one moment. Okay. I'm having a little
19 technical difficulty, but I'm right here. Okay.
20 Thank you so much for your time and I'm very excited
21 that you have been so open to hearing my bill, Intro
22 1949, as we continue to battle the lasting effects of
23 Covid 19. Today, through the hearing of Intro 1949,
24 we are taking proactive steps to ensure that our
25 cities emergency planning process is sufficient to

1 respond to our community's needs. My bill would
2 require the Office of Emergency Management to ensure
3 the periodic review of all plans guiding the city's
4 response to do and ensuring the continuity of agency
5 operations during emergency circumstances. Although
6 New York City is taking steps towards disaster
7 preparedness, our response to Covid 19 has been far
8 more reactive than proactive. At the peak of the
9 pandemic, our preparedness was apparent-- our
10 unpreparedness, I should say, was apparent through
11 the lack of supplies at all levels. A lack of PPE
12 and ventilators led to unsafe working conditions and
13 even the death of many patients and employees in our
14 hospitals. Mutual aid groups popped up to respond to
15 food insecurity and reach our most vulnerable
16 populations. Our educational system was forced to
17 reimagine itself without any time for logistical
18 coordination, leaving thousands of students without
19 the proper tools for success. Now, that the same
20 reactive approach has been taken with regard to
21 vaccine distribution, resulting in confusion and
22 unequal distribution. This pattern cannot continue
23 and, as legislators, we have a duty to intervene and
24 that is exactly what Intro 1949 was designed to do.
25

2 So, I think you so much. I look forward to hearing
3 the administration and to asking questions, as well
4 as responding to questions. Thank you, Chair
5 Borelli.

6 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you, Madam
7 Majority Leader. Josh, if you would continue from
8 before. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, sir. So,
10 where was I? So, the first panel is to give
11 testimony will be representatives from New York City
12 Emergency Management. Testimony will be provided by
13 NYCEM's deputy director of readiness, Jake Cooper,
14 and assistant commissioner of interagency
15 coordination, Joanna Conroy. I will call on you when
16 it is your turn to speak. During the hearing, if
17 Council members would like to ask a question of the
18 administration or of a specific panelist, please use
19 the zoom raise hand function and I will call on you
20 in order. All hearing participants should submit
21 written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov. I
22 will now call on representatives in the
23 administration to testify. Before we begin, I will
24 administer the oath. Deputy Commissioner Cooper and
25 assistant commissioner Conroy, I will call on each of

2 you individually for response. Please raise your
3 right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
4 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before these
5 committees and respond honestly to Council member
6 questions?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Commissioner
9 Cooper?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And assistant
12 commissioner Conroy?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CONROY: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

15 Thank you so much.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Thank you.

17 Good afternoon, Chair Borelli and Public Advocate
18 Williams and members of the New York City Council. I
19 am Jake Cooper, Deputy Commissioner for readiness of
20 New York City Emergency Management. I am joined by
21 my colleague, Johanna Conroy, assistant commissioner
22 for interagency operations. We are pleased to be
23 here to discuss emergency planning for the city of
24 New York. New York City Emergency Management helps
25 New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies or

1 preparedness, education, and response. The agency is
2 responsible for coordinating citywide emergency
3 planning and response for all types and scales of
4 emergencies. It is staffed by more than 200
5 dedicated professionals with diverse backgrounds and
6 areas of expertise, including individuals assigned
7 from other city agencies. We have been fully
8 activated for Covid 19 for almost one year. During
9 this time, there been multiple overlapping
10 activations such as heat emergencies, snowstorms,
11 tropical storm Isaias, and smaller emergencies that
12 require interagency coordination, including building
13 collapses, fires, the infrastructure incidents, water
14 main breaks, and other events. Additionally,
15 emergency management has assisted with large-scale
16 programs such as Get Food, Get Cool, and, more
17 recently, the Vaccine Command Center. For the first
18 time ever, we have run operations and emergencies
19 mostly virtually, although many staff have worked in
20 person and, like everyone else in the city, we have
21 not been immune to the personal and devastating
22 impacts of Covid 19. Allow me a moment to express my
23 gratitude to the workers of Emergency Management who
24 have literally worked around-the-clock over the past
25

1 year in an unending activation cycle while also
2 continuing our nonemergency work, mandates, and
3 responsibilities, as well. For a small agency, this
4 is no small feat and we should all be grateful and
5 thankful to the dedication and commitment of the
6 city's emergency managers. Let me now discuss show
7 agency-- how the agency coordinates planning
8 efforts. As we all know, every emergency can create
9 new and unforeseen conditions. Emergency management
10 is responsible for the development, maintenance, and
11 oversight of 150 planning documents, spanning plans,
12 protocols, guides, and standard operating procedures
13 for multiple natural and man-made hazards. Plans are
14 either operationally specific, such as debris
15 management, or hazard specific, such as the New York
16 City Coastal Storm Plan. They include citywide
17 objectives for managing the incident, logistical
18 resource needs, templates for interagency
19 coordination and data management, and checklists for
20 key tasks and actions. These plans include
21 coordinated roles and responsibilities of key
22 stakeholders, primarily city agencies, for these
23 events are formalized under the Citywide Incident
24 Management System, or CIMS. CIMS relies on assigning
25

responsibility to particular emergencies based on an agency's core competencies. For example, NYPD is responsible for law enforcement and investigating terrorism. Fire department is responsible for fire suppression. Sanitation is responsible for snow and garbage removal and Department of Health is responsible for public health, pandemics, etc. this year, the city is updating CIMS in a multiagency and comprehensive effort. Emergency Management's planning process is one of collaboration and coordination. We follow a phased approach that starts with initiation, develop, finalize, distribute, and socialize. In the initiation phase, we identify planning needs and relevant stakeholders. This can include city agencies, state and federal partners, private sector partners, not-for-profit partners, and community organizations. In the development phase, we work closely with relevant city agencies and other stakeholders to create documents objectives, scope, and detail of operation. Emergency management coordinates and conducts many interagency planning meetings to accomplish this work and in the finalization phase, we build document components and circulate for a review among internal

2 and external partners. In the distribution and
3 socialization page, we internally publish the
4 documents and distribute to external and internal
5 stakeholders. Planning documents are not publicized
6 or made public due to the sensitive nature of many of
7 the tactical operations included in them.

8 Information on locations and staging areas, locations
9 of key resources, and specific capabilities of
10 agencies are privileged information and not
11 beneficial for public consumption. All this planning
12 requires testing and training to make plans that are
13 operational, usable, and ready to go. We have a
14 robust training and exercise program to build
15 capacity for implementation. We exercise our plans
16 consistently with all stakeholders. Last year,
17 despite the pandemic and having to move EOC
18 activities virtually, emergency management held 21
19 different exercises and tested parts or entirety of
20 plans. Planning documents are reviewed yearly with
21 updates coming at least once every three years.
22 Updates, about for a number of reasons including
23 threat trends, agency priorities, stakeholder
24 priorities, and other factors. Our plans are meant
25 to serve as a guide, a living document rather than a

1 static one on how to respond to a particular
2 emergency. Given that every emergency is different,
3 plans are designed to be scalable and have different
4 elements activated or not based upon need. Coupled
5 with training and exercises, part of emergency
6 management's continuous improvement effort is the
7 evaluation of emergency response and activations
8 through a multi-agency assessment process called
9 After Action Review. This includes fact-finding
10 through post emergency debrief sessions, surveys,
11 interviews, document reviews leading to an after
12 action report with recommendations for improvement
13 and then implementing those recommendations.
14
15 Emergency planning in New York City incorporates
16 multiple levels of coordination and collaboration and
17 cooperation. I am happy to discuss further during
18 your questions. Now, I will speak briefly about the
19 legislation we are hearing today. Regarding
20 Introduction 849 2018, 1949 2020, and 1987 2020, we
21 look forward to working with you to satisfy the
22 intent of these bills and further informed the
23 Council on how we plan for, respond to, and recover
24 from emergency. We already share information on our
25 plans and multiple plans themselves with the Council

based on legislation passed after hurricane Sandy.

As previously noted, while we share overall

information about how the city plans for emergencies

on our website for the public, we do not publish the

actual plans as they contain sensitive information

from partner agencies who may not collaborate with us

in the future if they knew their details would be

made public. Especially those with sensitive agency

operations or those outside of the city government

structure. However, we do have built in public

assessment and certain components, such as our yearly

public hearings conducted by the Disabilities,

access, and Functional Needs Unit, also known as

DAFN, with members of the DAFN community to better

inform our emergency planning surrounding this

community. In reference to the Introduction 2057

2020, which creates an emergency student food plan,

the New York City Department of Education possesses

the core competencies for feeding students which they

have carried out continuously through the Covid 19

emergency. DOE and the Mayor's Office of Food Policy

should be brought into discussions on this bill and

where it best fits. In reference to Introduction

2088 which requires emergency management to report on

2 the city's preparedness and response to the citywide
3 and public health emergencies, this likely is better
4 handled by the Department of Health and Mental
5 Hygiene given their expertise. We are happy to have
6 a broader discussion about informing the Council on
7 our planning, however, we are not the subject matter
8 expert to a report on this type of emergency. Thank
9 you for allowing me to inform the public on how
10 emergency management plans for emergencies and to
11 comment on this legislation. As you can see,
12 planning for emergencies is a complex endeavor
13 requiring constant collaboration, consultation, and
14 coordination. We are extraordinarily proud of the
15 work we have done the plan for emergencies in New
16 York City while realizing that improvement is an ever
17 present goal. As an agency, it is our core mission
18 to plan for, respond to, and recover from
19 emergencies. We take those responsibilities very
20 seriously and look forward to your questions and
21 comments. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you very
23 much, Deputy Commissioner. So, I mean, you actually
24 answered a lot of the questions that I had jotted
25 down ahead of time. But the first question I will

2 ask is this: I've been Chair of this committee for
3 three years now-- over three years-- and we've
4 talked a lot about the planning that NYCEM does in
5 advance of different dangers and potential
6 situations. I've never heard a pandemic mentioned
7 prior to 2020. So, was there significant agency
8 planning for a pandemic in conjunction with the
9 health agencies? And the second part is how do you
10 pick what disasters are on the menu of things New
11 York City EM prepares for? You know, in other words,
12 do you prepare for tornados? Do you prepare for-- I
13 mean, a volcano is not going to happen, right, so I'm
14 assuming that's not on the menu of things. But how
15 do you pick and choose what will be within the
16 agency's purview to respond to? Thank you.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Let me answer
18 the pandemic planning question first, Chair Borelli.
19 So, the city does have a pandemic plan. The
20 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has that
21 plan. The city also has an H1N1 plan and I think the
22 thing to remember, while we didn't have a Covid 19
23 plan, we had elements of other plans such as, you
24 know, commodities distribution and food. We had the
25 public health and safety plan from workers that was

1 used to leverage. We take elements of those all
2 hazard plans and combine them with DOHMH's pandemic
3 plan and also things we've learned from H1N1. So, I
4 talked about-- in my testimony-- that many
5 emergencies are novel in nature, but there's
6 something that was different about it and I think
7 that's why really we do the two prong approach of,
8 you know, hazard-specific planning and then the all
9 hazards approach which you can apply those to any
10 type of an emergency. And, you know, they're guides.
11 They're meant to be scalable and flexible and so, for
12 Covid 19, we really pulled from a lot of those
13 different plans to sort of respond. Now, on sort of
14 how do we pick things that we plan for, it's a great
15 question. There's a few ways. There's a formal
16 process that we go through that we're required to do
17 that's called THRA. It's threats, hazards, risk
18 assessment that we have to do-- required to do that
19 by FEMA. But it's actually a process that brings in
20 all the stakeholders and partners from city agencies
21 and we go through and we talk about all the different
22 hazards and do a hazard analysis, essentially, and
23 look towards, you know, where are our potential gaps?
24 Where are areas we need to exercise more of? Where

2 are our training needs? Where's there a gap in
3 planning? And through that process, we often come up
4 with sort of areas or hazards that we do need to
5 focus on. So, that's one way we do it. That's a
6 very formal process, but it engages a lot of partners
7 and, you know, we're required to do that process.
8 The other way we do it is we look at what's going on
9 in the nation, obviously, or we look at other
10 disasters to see what threats are out there. I think
11 one of the-- I'll give you a good example that NYC
12 Three working with Do It and NYPD have been working
13 on lately. It's cyber. So, they looked at the
14 things that happened in Atlanta. They looked at the
15 things that happened in San Francisco and sort of
16 issues of ransomware. Now, there's already a city
17 cyber plan, but after that event, they started to
18 look at their protocols and come up with different--
19 start to tease out some of those issues or things
20 that could come up related on that. So, that's
21 another way. A third way is based on priorities of
22 other city agencies. Threats change. Obviously,
23 like when we've done these hazard analyses now,
24 people are very interested in working on further
25 pandemic planning, which, obviously, you know, we are

2 doing. So that's another way. Coming from city
3 agencies or the state is another way. Sorry. That
4 was very long winded. I apologize.

5 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: No. It's okay. I
6 mean, it's a great answer. Can you go over how your
7 agency interacts with your counterparts in other
8 jurisdictions whether they be the state and federal,
9 you know, government or just other large cities
10 around the US?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Sure. So let
12 me talk about something we're really proud of that
13 was started a few commissioners ago. I've been in
14 emergency management since 2002, but there was a
15 group called Big City Emergency Managers. One thing
16 that we saw is that really-- there's not a lot of--
17 there used to be not a lot of attention paid to urban
18 areas. That the planning and the response is
19 different in urban areas. A lot of emergency
20 management is focused on state coordination and I
21 think that we created this body called Big City
22 Emergency Managers which is a group that meets on a
23 monthly basis and then actually-- virtually-- but
24 then they also usually have one or two times a year
25 will have an in person meeting to share lessons

1 learned. So, that form has been really excellent in
2 connecting to problems that are really unique to
3 urban areas as opposed to states or more rural areas.
4 So that's one way. In terms of the state, we work
5 very closely with the state to-- State Emergency
6 Management. We are constantly talking to them.
7 They're involved with all our exercises. They are
8 at-- We also work with them which they have their
9 own-- I mentioned THRA. And not to keep throwing
10 out acronyms, but there's SIPA [sp?] which is a
11 capability assessment they ask us to do with them
12 which is another good process that helps us determine
13 planning gaps, exercise needs, or training needs. So
14 that's our work with the state. And, you know, the
15 federal government we work with quite a bit through
16 the state and also the Region Two office and,
17 obviously, FEMA we collaborate on with training and
18 exercising and also different technology. We have an
19 office of science and technology in Homeland Security
20 which is here in the city that we do exercises with
21 and things. So, there's a lot of different
22 connecting points, but those are the more formal
23 ways.
24

2 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you. I have
3 questions on some of the bills that we're hearing,
4 but I want to give an opportunity for the sponsors to
5 get the first crack at them. So, if you are a
6 Council member who sponsored a bill and would like to
7 speak, just click the thing. I'll give you a second.
8 If not, I shall ask a couple of questions myself.
9 Councilman Levine.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chair. Just very briefly. I appreciate the
12 opportunity to ask the Deputy Commissioner about
13 questions of refugees arriving to New York City due
14 to crisis elsewhere, as I mentioned in my opening
15 statement related to Intro 849. Does NYC Emergency
16 Management support other jurisdictions in preparing
17 emergency response to natural disasters?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Council
19 member, you're asking if we help other
20 jurisdictions-- help them prepare to accept people
21 also that would be displaced?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Well, I'm actually
23 talking about, I guess, pre refugee crisis, whether
24 you support in the disaster response, jurisdictions
25

1 that are less capable than us that can use our
2 support.

3
4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Yeah. So, we
5 share the same concerns that you have about displaced
6 people coming from other disaster areas. The city
7 has a tradition in this. You know, you look at
8 hurricane Katrina and the things that this agency
9 working with formerly HRA and DSS and the things that
10 they did to help people and then, obviously, more
11 recently, hurricane Maria in setting up services for
12 those people. When we were dealing with some of the
13 issues, we were-- I remember talking to the state of
14 Florida, the city of Miami, because they were
15 experiencing things sometimes on a different
16 timeline. We talked to these places and other cities
17 because they may experience a wave of people before
18 we do and share lessons learned. I remember
19 specifically about Maria, talking to the state of
20 Florida about housing. You know, that's the
21 universally really difficult issue and I think it's,
22 obviously, compounded in New York City because there
23 is a shortage of affordable housing and that crunch
24 that we feel. And we also spoke to sort of other

2 large cities up to coast, but I remember talking to
3 Florida, Miami and the state, quite a bit.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: I appreciate that.
5 And just for time, I just want to ask a follow up.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Sure.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: So, once refugees
8 arrive here, then--

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: but the-- the
10 other thing you have to remember, I mean, we are 250
11 people at most and so we really, in order to get the
12 most done, we need to empower other agencies to take
13 the lead on things. You know, for a catastrophic
14 event, we can't run everything and lead everything.
15 We need agencies to do that, as well, like they did
16 and I think that service center is another example of
17 that that was in Spanish Harlem after four hurricane
18 Maria.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Yes. Understood.
20 So, in addition to housing which is, obviously, first
21 and foremost for refugees, what else is on the list
22 of menu of services that you seek to provide to
23 refugees?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Food,
25 clothing, transportation in some situations, language

2 resources, you know, particularly in that instance,
3 you know, language providing services in the
4 appropriate language is really important. And then,
5 you know, the community organizations that were there
6 were really helping integrate people into the
7 community which I think was very important, too.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And now, of course,
9 that medical care, mental health care, and legal
10 assistance to that list.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Yeah. Yeah.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And I'm going to
13 wrap up for time, but I'll just point out that we
14 have had six or eight different programmatic areas
15 that we acknowledge refugees need support on and that
16 the intent of Intro 849 is to create a unified entity
17 that can coordinate across those various entities to
18 have a plan in place. I won't say if, but when we're
19 faced with another refugee crisis in New York City.
20 So, I'm going to wrap up there to keep it brief, but
21 thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Deputy
22 Commissioner.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Thank you.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you. I'll
3 now recognize Majority Leader Cumbo for her
4 questions.

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you so much.
6 Mr. Cooper, I wanted to focus on 1949 and to ask
7 further questions. I know when I came into office
8 initially, we were dealing with the dynamics of
9 hurricane Sandy and I watched as many of our
10 colleagues were being very reactive in terms of
11 having to scramble to find solutions or opportunities
12 to work with our different agencies or public spaces,
13 like our schools and otherwise, for shelter and
14 resources. In terms of 1949, my question is do you
15 feel that it's possible for us to become more
16 proactive in terms of anticipating what are the
17 various kinds of emergencies that could happen and
18 how do we work through them? And most importantly, I
19 would say and what is the City Council-- and how do
20 you feel the City Council could be a partner in that
21 work? Because I feel that-- and I'm hoping that
22 this legislation would address that-- is that the
23 siloed approach that happens often leaves that, when
24 a disaster happens, that we have to start from
25 scratch on how to address it.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Yeah. Council
3 member, that-- this siloed approach is something I
4 entirely agree with what you're saying. It really
5 creates a very difficult response and I think, as the
6 coordinating agency, emergency management works to
7 break down those silos and I think we do that a lot
8 of different ways through training and exercise, but
9 also I think it's really important just to bring in
10 what I talked about the planning process, that it's
11 important to engage the stakeholders in the planning
12 process and not create something in a vacuum and it's
13 expected to work. So, I just wanted to echo the
14 things that you were saying. I agree silos are never
15 good. So, with specifically about 1949, there are
16 some-- you know, we would like to talk further about
17 it. There are some aspects of it that are beneficial
18 and I think that, you know, making some summaries of
19 components of the plan that is available to the
20 public is something we would like to talk further
21 about. We think that is beneficial for the public to
22 know some of the things that are in place. I think
23 one of the ways that city Council could really help
24 us-- and city Council does help us with this-- is
25 to get the word out and I know through the elected

2 official calls that we have run, you guys are-- this
3 body in particular is one of the best amplifiers of
4 that message and to continue to do that. But also
5 encourage for Notify NYC so they get that real time
6 emergency information that we constantly push out,
7 but also, as you know, I'm sure a lot of you know
8 about our Ready New York campaign. You know, we
9 really-- What other things we wanted to do is get
10 the public to prepare themselves. You know,
11 household preparedness, really the more of that we
12 can do, the more time we can devote to vulnerable
13 populations and people that truly need our help. So,
14 if we can talk about how you can help us, City
15 Council, that's definitely one way to continue to do
16 that and amplify those things. And then-- Sorry.
17 Go ahead.

18 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I want to-- I
19 guess, digging deeper into it--

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Sure.

21 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Something that I
22 was-- I mean, what I was hoping that the intent of
23 this legislation would do would be to identify what
24 those disasters could be whether it's hurricane,
25 tornado, or a massive shooting or all these different

2 kinds of things that could happen like germ warfare
3 like we're seeing like with the pandemic like Covid.
4 It's all these different things that require
5 different responses.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Uh-hm.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: So, as a Council
8 member, it would be far more empowering if, even on a
9 quarterly basis, that we meet to discuss how these
10 plans are functioning and operating such as what
11 schools can be used as fallout shelters, what-- in
12 the situation of like a Sandy or a hurricane Katrina
13 style, where are the areas where we can direct our
14 communities to if they have to go to for shelter?
15 Where are the areas that people can go to that we can
16 immediately direct them to food? Where are the areas
17 in terms of if people have medical issues such as
18 diabetes and they have to have heart medication or
19 they have to have insulin or whatever the dynamics
20 are that these things are set up in a way that an
21 elected leader is completely empowered to know this
22 is my fallout shelter. This is the schools that we
23 will direct people to. These are the modes of
24 communication that are then presented to us to be
25 able to communicate because not everybody is a Justin

2 Brannan, right? So, we all are not going to have the
3 level of social media outreach as some of our
4 colleagues, right? So, some of us have to have that
5 ability to be able to communicate in times of
6 emergency--

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Yeah.

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: that's effective
9 for an entire district. Like it would be a shame if
10 our modes of being able to reach our district are
11 based off of your following versus, you know, what
12 radio programs are accessible to us, how can we
13 reach-- it's so many different things that we've had
14 to learn. I think also there should be a listing of
15 telephone numbers, you know, that your office, Office
16 of Emergency Management, all of these different
17 offices like help us to coordinate working documents
18 and lists of, you know, all of our NYCHA development
19 leaders, all of our tenant Association leaders. A
20 lot of this we have from events that we do, but
21 there's got to be a lot more in terms of even how do
22 we train those tenant association leaders who have
23 taken on these responsibilities. How are they then
24 trained to work with our leaders, to work with their
25 communities in times of emergency to know what to do

2 in those spaces? And I just feel like, you know,
3 unfortunately, that really hasn't happened.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: So, there's a
5 lot for me to unpack there, so I'm going to try to
6 address some of the things that you talked about.
7 And first to talk about facility specific things like
8 this desire that you talked about about being able to
9 tell your constituency where the fallout shelter is
10 or those sorts of things. So we do planning on that
11 granular level for shelters and such not. We're very
12 careful. This is one of the things we are concerned
13 about is releasing that information to the public
14 because we don't-- there's a few operational
15 concerns. You know, we have these number of
16 shelters, over 400, and we have evacuation centers,
17 but we don't open them all simultaneously. We open
18 them up based upon need. So, we want to push people
19 to evacuation centers. The concern is that sometimes
20 things come up. Air conditioners break. There could
21 be a capital project going on at a school and so we
22 really want to have that type of information given to
23 the public, you know, right before the disaster so
24 that when they go to that place that was designated a

2 shelter, that it is, indeed, open. So I think
3 that's--

4 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: one of the
6 concerns. But I think you're pointing something out
7 that I agree with. It's like how do we get that
8 information to people? I think it-- you know, I,
9 again, this bill would be good to talk more about
10 some of the things and if that means talking to the
11 city Council members more and educating them on
12 components of these plans and ways to amplify the
13 message on or before a disaster or during a disaster.
14 I think that's a worthwhile discussion and I agree.
15 Another thing I wanted to address was you talked like
16 about-- like you talked about NYCHA developments and
17 how to, you know, kind of train people on how to deal
18 with that. I think one of the best avenues-- and
19 it's been very successful and it's just continuing to
20 do this-- is our community emergency response teams,
21 which are CERT, which are volunteers that help during
22 a disaster. And so, I think that getting people to
23 train with CERT, working with NYCHA with that and
24 people that-- community liaisons that work for
25 NYCHA, I think that would be a great initiative to

2 sort of amplify that to improve that type of response
3 and then, you know, sort of have boots on the ground
4 that area dealing with people in those facilities.

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Can I just-- I
6 just want to conclude with this because--

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Sure.

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I like my bill, but
9 as I'm even talking to you, I feel like I need more
10 bills or I need to go deeper into this bill.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: More bills.

12 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Because I feel,
13 essentially, that where we need to go as a city is
14 that we can no longer have emergency preparedness
15 plans in case of an emergency. We have to live and
16 work and function almost as if we know there is a
17 pending emergency always going to happen. You know,
18 the I feel like we have kind of looked at it like, I
19 hope everything is going to go okay and nothing
20 happens, but it is like we have seen with 9/11, we
21 have seen with hurricane Sandy, we have seen with
22 Covid. Like emergencies and disasters are now a
23 frequent part of our life. And so, unfortunately,
24 we, as a society and people, have to live more in a
25 state of emergency then not and so, you know, regular

2 briefings about emergency preparedness, regular
3 briefings about contact information, regular
4 briefings about your fallout shelter that was once
5 the fallout shelter is now having capital
6 construction. We are now going to move you to the
7 Atlantic Armory. We are now going to move this to
8 that. You know, it has to be that we, as a city,
9 move forward in a way of always being constantly
10 updated and prepared. Our city has to become
11 prepared. It's like I have traveled very
12 infrequently to California and it's a different kind
13 of thing, like how the students there are prepared to
14 stop, drop, go underneath certain spaces and safe
15 places when they know an earthquake is about to
16 happen because they know that that is a part of their
17 life. So, we know that emergencies of all sorts are
18 now a part of our life and we have to rev up to
19 understanding that that is a regular part of our
20 lifestyle now. And I will conclude with that.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: You not going
22 to get disagreement from me on a lot of what you just
23 said because I think, again, I just wanted to plug
24 our Pretty New York program because the things that
25 you are saying are really central tenets of personal

2 preparedness and, like you said, the public needs to
3 be informed about disasters and how to respond to
4 them and is Ready New York campaign is really, I
5 think, one of the best avenues to do that because
6 everybody that can needs to take care of themselves
7 so that we can help people that need our help. You
8 know, but I agree a lot with what you said.

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Sure.

11 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: And we will be in
12 touch.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Okay.

14 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you. Yeah.
15 I forgot where my fallout shelter was. I'm not too
16 familiar with where mine is. I definitely have to
17 follow up with that, Majority Leader.

18 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Here to help.

19 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: I definitely agree
20 with you that students don't seem is prepared as
21 perhaps they should be for certain threats and
22 problems. I do not have any more questions about the
23 legislation. If no one else has any more questions,
24 we will conclude this panel. If that is the case,
25 then that is fine.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Thank you both very
4 much for testifying and we appreciate your
5 participation.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: Thank you.
7 Have a good day.

8 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: You, too. Josh, is
9 there any more public testimony?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: There is not,
11 Chair.

12 CHAIRPERSON BORELLI: Okay. At this
13 time, if you have not been recognized and you wish to
14 testify, please raise your hand using the zoom raise
15 hand function. I don't see, so I will conclude this
16 hearing and wish everyone a good and happy new year.
17 Wish the former commissioner a best of luck
18 monitoring emergencies for our country at FEMA and
19 thank you both for participating. We are over.

20 [gavel]

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Okay. We have stopped
22 the livestream. Thank you all.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Everyone have a good
24 rest of the day.

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 4, 2021