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**Testimony by New York State Senator Brad Hoylman
and Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
Before the New York City Council Committee on Public Housing
Oversight Hearing on Emergency Planning and Management
During and After the Storm:
NYCHA Emergency Planning and Response
January 17, 2013**

Our names are Brad Hoylman and Richard Gottfried and we represent New York State's 27th Senate District and 75th Assembly District, respectively, in which Fulton Houses and Chelsea-Elliott are located. In addition, the 27th Senate District includes Campos Plaza I and II, Riis I and Riis II, Harborview Terrace, 344 East 28th Street, Lower East Side III and Lower East Side Rehab (Group V).

As the State Senator and Assembly Member representing the residents of these New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, we are particularly concerned about NYCHA's failure to properly plan for and respond to Superstorm Sandy, leaving tens of thousands of residents without heat, water, electricity, food, means of egress, medical attention, or clear information for days on end. We applaud the New York City Council Committee on Public Housing and Chair Rosie Mendez for holding this hearing to shine a light on deficiencies in NYCHA's emergency planning and management so that New York City's public housing residents never again face such disproportionate hardship in a disaster's wake.

We know that you will hear from many other elected officials, advocates and public housing residents who will detail a wide range of shortcomings in the agency's efforts. We wish to focus on only a handful of the myriad concerns.

Much has been made of the fact many residents of NYCHA's Zone A buildings chose to ignore the City's mandatory evacuation order. We understand the Authority moved assiduously in the days leading up to the storm to encourage residents to leave, but much more must be done in the future to ensure and facilitate evacuation, especially for frail, elderly and disabled residents. We are particularly struck and deeply troubled by the Authority's failure to check in on the most vulnerable residents of NYCHA buildings both in and outside Zone A that were left without power, heat or water in the first days after the storm had passed.

NYCHA has stated that the Authority compiles and maintains a list of vulnerable residents, including seniors, mobility-impaired residents, and residents on life support or who require critical care. However, we have heard from a number of residents in affected developments that no one from NYCHA knocked on their door in the aftermath of the storm to see if they were

there and/or needed assistance. Rather, residents of varying ages, mobility and health status had to rely upon visits from elected officials, advocacy organizations and grassroots volunteers to see if they needed food, blankets, medication, etc. And because those who mobilized to help in the storm's aftermath did not have access to the lists of vulnerable residents NYCHA says it maintains, they were not able to triage and first visit those apartments with residents most likely to need help.

We applaud all those who volunteered in the aftermath of the storm to canvass and bring aide to their fellow New Yorkers. Such voluntary efforts were essential in light of the widespread devastation the storm wreaked, but we want to stress that the coordination of efforts in NYCHA developments should have come from the Authority. In a number of other high-rise developments in the 27th Senate District, including Waterside Plaza and Westbeth Artists' Housing, management solicited help from elected officials and neighborhood volunteers and facilitated their efforts on-the-ground. That was also the case in some public housing developments but it should have been the case in all of them.

It is also notable that in the immediate aftermath of the storm, a coalition of Lower Manhattan elected officials coordinated by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, of which we were a part, was unable to get detailed information from NYCHA on conditions and recovery efforts underway at affected developments in our districts. In fact, it is our understanding that the first written report NYCHA emailed to elected officials, which included aggregate numbers but not information about individual developments, did not come until a full week after the storm hit.

As you know, many NYCHA buildings faced delays in having power, heat and water restored even after these services were returned to the surrounding area. While a number of privately owned buildings likewise experienced delays in restoring their systems, NYCHA's difficulties appear to be rooted in both a lack of urgency and chronic problems that the Authority has had managing its vast portfolio of properties. For example, as was reported in the December 10, 2012 *New York Times*, the City did not seek Army Corps of Engineers' assistance in restoring power at NYCHA buildings until five days after the storm. Then the Authority was unable to provide an up-to-date list of generator requirements for each building, forcing the corps to do its own survey of 100 NYCHA buildings to identify the type of generator each needed before the corps could even think about installing them.

The same *Times* report cited NYCHA's failure to have "standby contracts" for boilers, pumps and generators as recommended by a report drafted by the City in response to Hurricane Katrina. It notes that even when NYCHA was able to obtain temporary boiler rentals, which were ordered by the City four days after the storm and took up to a week to arrive, it took longer than it should have to install them because the City first tried to reuse motors damaged by flood waters.

Certainly Sandy posed extraordinary challenges for hundreds of thousands of property owners and residents within New York's floodplain, but the disproportionate suffering of NYCHA residents underscores the need for additional resources to make up for years of chronic underfunding as well as systemic reforms, like those proposed last August by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, to increase the Authority's efficiency and accountability.

We are confident that many cogent recommendations for improving NYCHA's emergency planning and management will result from this oversight hearing and we again applaud Councilmember Mendez and the Committee on Public Housing for taking this initiative. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to submit testimony.