



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Hundreds Attend Senator Sanders Town Hall Meeting on Sewage Spill in SE Queens

JAMES SANDERS JR. December 10, 2019



Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway) held a town hall meeting on Sunday, December 8, 2019 at PS 223 in Jamaica to address the recent sewage spill in Southeast Queens, which damaged some 300 homes over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

"This is a terrible and unfortunate incident to have happened, especially around the holidays," Sanders said. "My office will be working with the city and all of the appropriate agencies to help affected homeowners recover and resume their busy lives."

Senator Sanders was joined by other Queens elected officials and all relevant city agencies to provide residents with updates on the situation and answer their many questions. The primary concern people had regarded covering the cost of the cleanup and repairs to their homes, whether the cleanup crews dispatched by the city were qualified and any health repercussions stemming from being near the sewage.

Many homeowners have flood insurance, which does not cover disasters like sewage spills. All affected residents may file a claim with the NYC Office of the Comptroller within 90 days of their loss. However, the Comptroller's Office will not begin to process claims until the Department of Environmental Protection determines the exact cause of the blockage. It is also important to note that if a person decides to hire a private lawyer, they forfeit their ability to file a claim with the Comptroller.

The exact cause of the blockage is still unknown, is being investigated and will take a few more days, according to DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza. The affected pipe, which is located 40 feet below ground, is hard to reach and excavate, leading to the delay. Areas heavily impacted by the sewage spill include the section of Jamaica near the Belt Parkway and Kennedy Airport.

The city has added a pump around system (a pipe at ground level that can carry the sewage away from the area), while the main pipe is being repaired. DEP and the Department of Health told residents that the water in their homes is safe to drink because it is transported through different pipes.

The DOH also said they tested the air quality in the affected homes and nothing abnormal was detected. They also have an epidemiologist who will continue to evaluate the areas flooded by sewage. Senator Sanders told the DOH that he wants to receive continuous

reports regarding their findings.

Deanne Criswell Commissioner of the NYC Emergency Management Department said all of the cleaning crews dispatched to homes by the city are qualified to perform the sewage removal services and that the work is evaluated by a city inspector once its completed to ensure it meets the highest standards and is conducted to the satisfaction of the homeowner.

Senator Sanders advised all of the city agencies that they need to be more proactive regarding the maintenance and cleaning of pipes and other infrastructure and to improve response times when unforeseen accidents do occur. Many residents complained about what they considered a poor performance by 311.

The city has set up an emergency center at the Courtyard Marriott, 145-11 North Conduit Avenue, Jamaica, NY 11436, to provide affected residents with resources.

Senator Sanders has a limited supply of cleaning kits available for pick up at his District Office for those who need the proper gear. He also has Comptroller claim forms. Contact Lisa George at Senator Sanders' Office for more information, 718-523-3069.

We would like to thank PS 223 for the use of their space to host the event.