



## **Hurricane Sandy and Affordable Housing: Exposing a Persistent Crisis, Providing an Opportunity for Real Solutions**

Hurricane Sandy exposed and exacerbated the ongoing affordable housing crisis in New York City. Before the hurricane touched down, a record 48,000 people were already sleeping in City shelters each night, including more than 20,000 children. Thousands more families were living in unstable housing situations, including illegally-converted apartments and overcrowded conditions. Many of these marginally-housed families were living in the low-income coastal neighborhoods impacted most heavily by Sandy.

Three months after the hurricane, well over 2,000 displaced households are still living in temporary hotels, SROs, and shelters paid for by FEMA and the City of New York. Thousands more remain in their affected communities, either in dangerous living conditions or doubled-up with family and friends. The majority of these households were struggling to survive on low-incomes even before the storm. They are now left with even fewer resources and much greater needs.

The biggest and most important need continues to be permanent, affordable housing, but the City's current resources for addressing this need are vastly inadequate. After the storm, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development created a housing portal meant to match low-income Sandy evacuees to affordable apartments. But so far, even these 'affordable' apartments are out of reach for most evacuees. Out of the 1,500 households who have registered with the portal, three-quarters have incomes *too low* to qualify for these units.

As the City begins to receive billions of dollars in federal aid, it is critical that these low-income displaced families are not left without assistance, nor should they be forced to compete with other homeless and low-income families for the dwindling stock of affordable housing that currently exists. Rebuilding must be used as an opportunity to expand the availability of affordable housing for all displaced families, including those left homeless by Hurricane Sandy as well as those previously forced out of the increasingly unaffordable housing market in New York City.

We call on the City and the federal government to immediately enact the following recommendations:

### **Immediate Needs**

1. Request New Federal Rental Vouchers for Low-Income New Yorkers. The City should immediately request at least 10,000 Housing Choice (Section 8) Vouchers, as allowed under the federal recovery bill (H.R. 152), to help displaced individuals and families secure permanent housing. Both the City and the

federal government should take all possible steps to expedite this process so as to move families out of temporary housing as quickly as possible.

2. Ensure that displaced households who receive temporary FEMA rental assistance are guaranteed long-term housing stability. For the lowest income displaced families and individuals, temporary FEMA rental assistance (limited to no more than 18 months) will not suffice to ensure housing stability. The City must work with the Federal government to ensure that FEMA rental assistance is used as a bridge to longer-term housing assistance like Section 8 vouchers for the poorest households.
3. Ensure marginally-housed families receive access to FEMA reimbursements and rental assistance. The federal government should recognize the unique housing market of New York City and allow households who were living in marginal housing without a standard lease to present other documentation to qualify for housing assistance.
4. Target New and Existing Housing Resources to the Lowest-Income Evacuees and Previously Homeless Families. The City should target all new and existing affordable housing resources – including NYCHA public housing and Section 8 resources and City-subsidized housing units – to help displaced New Yorkers, including those that were homeless before Hurricane Sandy.
5. Create a Local Rental Assistance Program Modeled on Section 8. The City and State should work together to create a new local rent subsidy, modeled on Section 8, that will provide much-needed additional resources to thousands of displaced and homeless families.

### **Long Term Needs**

1. Any new housing construction must expand housing stock for households living below 30 and 50 percent of Area Median Income. Recent “affordable” housing development has been, in reality, unaffordable to the lowest income New Yorkers. Rebuilding housing stock and stabilizing neighborhoods should require a significant portion of new housing to be affordable to the lowest income renter households.
2. Repair and Build Affordable and Supportive Housing: Immediate and long-term repairs must be made to public housing and other subsidized housing damaged by the storm. The Federal government should also immediately approve New York’s proposal to utilize Medicaid funding to create permanent supportive housing for people living with mental illness and other special needs.

### **The following organizations endorse these proposals:**

The Legal Aid Society  
Coalition for the Homeless  
Vocal NY  
Legal Services NYC

New York Communities for Change  
Occupy Sandy  
Families 2 Families  
The Alliance for a Just Rebuilding

These recommendations are made in conjunction with the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding. The Alliance for a Just Rebuilding brings together labor unions, workers centers and community, faith-based, environmental justice and policy organizations to ensure that both immediate relief and long-term rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Sandy are equitable and sustainable. We are committed to a just, equitable and sustainable recovery and rebuilding process that makes infrastructure and regulation more equitable, prioritizes transparency and community inclusion, creates new economic opportunity for ALL New Yorkers, particularly low-income communities and communities of color and includes a commitment to long-term climate sustainability and the elimination of environmental disparities across communities.