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Preparedness, Response, and Communications Subcommittee**

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Chairman Donovan, esteemed members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications, my name is Vincent Ignizio and I am currently the CEO of Catholic Charities of Staten Island. I have the unique position of being in the non-profit sector now having been an elected official when Sandy struck our shores over 3 years ago. I am grateful for the invitation to speak today as I previously have before the United States Senate on Sandy Recovery matters as well.

As the NYC Council representative for the south shore of Staten Island, I saw firsthand what worked, what didn't work, and what needs to be improved god forbid another storm comes our way.

During the evening of the storm Staten Island found itself as it quite often does - - alone. Despite the best hopes of pre-deployed City and State assets, when a major storm is at its height our bridges close, the ferry stops running, and Staten Island is virtually on its own.

Let me be clear, this is not a criticism, it is the fact of being an island when a serious storm comes our way. What made matters worse that infamous night is that the 911 system was either inoperable, congested, or both.

Borough President Oddo, then a NYC Councilman like myself was using Facebook throughout the night to help police and fire officials find those in need and/or trapped in their homes. What made matters worse is that Hurricane Irene came and went without the damage predicted. This led people into a false sense of security that sadly cost some their lives.

The surge is what was the greatest impact on Staten Island and with more than 2 dozen deaths and countless amounts of homes damaged, the morning after was eerily quiet.

With much of the power out on Staten Island, cell towers, internet, phones, and smartphones were inoperable. As an elected official I could not communicate the plight of my constituents to City Hall in that we had no access to any communication devices that would work.

Gasoline was difficult to come by in that most pumps utilize electricity to operate as well.

I myself went out to the end of Arden Avenue to try to get a signal on my cell phone from NJ -- which I was fortunately able to do. I ask to this day, why did the towers in Keansburg work and not ours?

Emergency shelters were soon swamped with donations and neighbors trying to help each other. This actually became a burden to the shelter system and the City reached out to Catholic Charities to ease the burden. They agreed to set up a distribution center which would help provide assistance to citizens in need of supplies from water to sheet rock and everything in between.

It is appropriate at this point to advise the committee that NYC has a hazy memory as of late when it comes to this point and we have been unable to secure any reimbursement funding for the time our buildings were off line due to the city's requested need. We as a local non-profit were happy to help and yet disappointed at the current administration which has refused to offset the costs we incurred and damage to our physical plant while assisting.

Since Hurricane Sandy dealt its blow to the community we have all been working hard to strengthen Staten Island's response. Sadly the storm itself allowed us to look at what would be needed as institutions and individuals alike.

We at Catholic Charities became the distribution center for the south shore, the build it back center, the rapid repair center, as well as the case-management site for those seeking assistance in our area. Our Board Chairman Gerard McEnerney and Monsignor Sullivan, who leads all of Catholic Charities in the New York Archdiocese, played the vital role in ensuring the partnership was one that served the community and its needs first and foremost. We knew we needed to act as expeditiously as possible as the need for assistance grew with every hour after the storm hit.

We learned the vital and rapid role NPO's play in the community when governments are just beginning to ramp up responses or unable to address ones specific needs in short order.

In fact we have learned that having a plan to pre-deploy supplies in case of emergencies is beneficial to both government and the NPO alike in case of a future disaster.

Towards that end we have partnered with Guyon Rescue a local organization that helped countless families after Sandy store a trailer on our campus that will be stocked with emergency supplies. This will allow for rapid deployment should the need arise.

Staten Island organizations have been working together to better understand the resources we have and how we can use them more efficiently. NPO's like the Jewish Community Center, Project Hospitality, and local churches have been working on emergency preparedness and planning individually and as a group.

Working together with government on all levels will ensure we learned the lessons from the past while making us ready for the future – one that we hope will never come.

With just one year on the job this coming week I can say that we in the NPO world recognize the need and vital role we play in helping our neighbors when emergencies strike. Having the committee on Staten Island is a strong statement and I want to thank you Mr. Chairman for your relentless efforts in making this hearing happen and ensuring we are prepared and receiving our fair share.

So much has changed and yet Staten Island has come out of all this stronger than before. We still have much to learn and hope your committee and great staff can assist us in making sure we are in fact better prepared.

In closing I want to thank all the great corporate partners that came to assist as well. From Tyson chicken to Walmart to faith-based organizations from across the country. There are too many to count and mention here today. Staten Island was fortunate to have such support and kindness from its neighbors from across this great nation.

The massive allocation of federal funds was/is appreciated as well. We have made and will continue to make Staten Island stronger and more resilient. We only hope the larger projects still in the planning stages come sooner than later and before we get hit again.

We at Catholic Charities of Staten Island fully intend on being a part of the solution and welcome any feedback or questions that I have the ability to field.

Thank You Very Much.