

STATEMENT OF
WILLIAM C. DAROFF
VICE PRESIDENT FOR PUBLIC POLICY
AND
DIRECTOR OF THE WASHINGTON OFFICE
UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITIES
BEFORE THE
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HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE
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Good morning. I am William Daroff, Vice President for Public Policy and Director of the Washington Office of United Jewish Communities (UJC). I want to thank the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) for the kind invitation to participate in this hearing focusing on the contributions of community-based organizations toward the post-Katrina and post-Rita relief and reconstruction efforts along our nation's Gulf Coast region. I commend the Senate HELP Committee for recognizing the value of community-based organizations and the important role they play in enhancing, serving, protecting, and rebuilding the places called "communities."

I have been asked in particular to comment on the activities undertaken by United Jewish Communities, in which we have effectively responded to the national disasters in the Gulf Coast region by working in partnership with other community-based organizations, as well as with local, state, and federal officials. It is an honor and a privilege to be here today and share the UJC story. I would like to start by describing exactly what UJC is and how it has partnered with others to address the needs of the citizens of the Gulf Coast region. I believe that the efforts put forth by UJC in the region can serve as an action framework for others to make a difference in how our nation responds to national disasters.

United Jewish Communities is the national organization that represents and serves 155 Jewish federations and 400 independent Jewish communities in more than 800 cities and towns across North America. UJC is the central planning and coordinating organization for an extensive network of Jewish health and social services. We provide a wide realm of services through thousands of affiliated hospitals, nursing homes and long-term care campuses, refugee resettlement organizations, children and family service agencies, job counseling centers and food banks, community centers and camps, and primary and secondary schools, as well as our inter-related national organizations. UJC is one of America's largest and most effective networks of social service providers. This network provides support for more than one million clients each year in the Jewish and

general community who are vulnerable and in need of assistance: families, the elderly, new immigrants, and the sick or disabled.

In addition, to unilateral activity, UJC is a national board member of the Emergency Food Shelter Board and has worked with United Way as part of a non-profit task force to discuss how the nation's largest nonprofits can cooperatively meet the social service needs of hurricane victims. UJC partners with other National Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster (NVOAD) agencies including the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, and Salvation Army to provide aid. We also serve on the National Advisory Committee for the Hurricane Fund for the Elderly of Grantmakers in Aging, which is a partnership with the Administration on Aging to direct philanthropic dollars and resources to organizations providing services to the most vulnerable older population in the Gulf Coast region.

As an example of how UJC can quickly mobilize its vast network of federations and social services affiliates, I would like to share the following:

UJC operates a standing Emergency Relief Committee that can marshal its resources within 24 hours. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, this committee was charged with identifying the emerging disaster relief needs that UJC could help meet. To meet these emerging needs, UJC and the federations of North America raised more than \$28 million in cash through a "Katrina Relief Fund" and facilitated the contribution of millions of dollars more through in-kind donations. Before the landfall of Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, UJC federations and our Gulf Coast affiliates were promptly alerted and began immediately arranging emergency shelter and food centers for evacuees. UJC sent senior staff to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to help develop and coordinate support among community-based organizations. Their mission was to reinforce the infrastructure of Baton Rouge to handle the incoming evacuating New Orleans residents. In addition, UJC sent staff to Houston, Texas, to help buttress our Houston and New Orleans affiliates in planning strategic and tactical responses. Shortly thereafter, UJC funding was allocated to local communities in the Gulf Coast region for emergency needs such as food and basic supplies, financial aid, mental-health counseling, temporary housing, and respite care for thousands of evacuees in the Jewish and general communities.

In the initial aftermath of the storm, UJC facilitated temporary shelter for Katrina evacuees in Jewish communities across the Southwest and South, including Austin, Dallas and Houston, Texas; Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge and Shreveport, Louisiana; Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee; and Central Florida and as far south as Palm Beach, Florida. We also helped establish an email and telephone communications network for evacuees through local host federations.

Last month, senior officials from UJC and the federation system conducted a weeklong site visit to the region. The primary purpose of this site visit was to

review the progress of the expenditures made from earlier UJC allocations, and to assess the more long-term social service needs of hurricane victims in the Jewish and general population. In addition, UJC wanted to express its strong commitment to aid the affected Gulf Coast communities in mapping recovery strategies.

In Mississippi, UJC met with the Honorable Connie Rocko, President, of the Harrison County Board of Supervisors, General Joseph Spraggins, Director of the Harrison County Emergency Operations, Brian Sanderson, Deputy Director of the Governor's Office of Recovery and Renewal, and Suzanne Case, Director of the Gulfport office for United States Senator Thad Cochran. We gave these local, state, and federal representatives a report of our efforts such as allocating emergency financial assistance to the Jackson, Mississippi community; along with sending thousands of school books and hundreds of boxes of clothing and blankets to Biloxi, Mississippi; and coordinating emergency financial and social service aid for Hurricane Katrina victims with St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. We also asked the local, state, and federal representatives how we could further support their government efforts to rebuild the Gulf Coast. The unanimous response was to continue "the UJC network efforts."

Moreover, UJC reached out to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau through its Executive Director, Stephen Richer, to gather background information on the post-Katrina economic impact on the region's primary revenue base and better assess how UJC could be resourceful. We also met with Virginia Newton, President of the Board of Trustees for the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning and Beverly Ward, from the U. S. Department of Education (now detailed to Mississippi). We discussed with these state and federal officials the impact on the community's education system and in particular how students of the Gulf Coast region were able to relocate and continue their studies. Earlier, UJC had coordinated a donation by a New York advertising agency of 15 computers and 2,500 backpacks containing school supplies from "Project Backpack" for a high school in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

In Houston and Dallas, Texas, UJC pooled its resources and partnered with the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast. The mission was to assess immediate needs and identify local community based organizations that regularly provide emergency and social service needs. Such organizations would now be tasked to double their workload with a burgeoning "new" population post Hurricane Katrina. In partnership with the Dallas Jewish Federation, UJC donated \$250,000 to the Dallas Mayor's Housing initiative to assist in providing housing for Katrina evacuees.

UJC federations and affiliated groups interacted with many local, state, and federal government officials in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A prime example of this kind of interaction in Baton Rouge involved local volunteer

Richard Lipsey and the Baton Rouge Jewish Federation to coordinate efforts with the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office so that off-duty officers and local volunteers were able to rescue individuals who were trapped in New Orleans. Friends and relatives called the New Orleans Federation, which was temporarily housed in Houston, with names and addresses of people who remained in New Orleans. The East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's office along with Baton Rouge volunteers then went in and evacuated them as well as anyone else they came across. The East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's office was also involved in the trip to rescue several Torah scrolls and other sacred objects from damaged synagogues in New Orleans.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston participated in Texas Governor Rick Perry's faith-based organization conference calls, which assisted with the coordination of hurricane relief efforts to maximize input and output. They also coordinated hurricane relief efforts with Texas State Senator Todd Staples. In addition, the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston funded a grant for approximately \$75,000 to the Harris County Medical Reserve Corporation to support 2,000 doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals at Reliant Stadium and the George R. Brown Convention Center providing medical treatment to Hurricane Katrina victims being housed there. This grant was timely, since the program was close to exhausting its funds. The medical program also increased from 200 volunteers to 2,000 volunteers.

UJC provided financial assistance to over 12 non-Jewish community based organizations such as the Ripley House, West Houston Assistance Ministries, and the Second Mile Mission Center. These community-based organizations offered food pantries, soup kitchens, clothing centers, counseling, coordinated housing, job training, and job bank centers for Hurricane Katrina victims. During our recent site visit, we met with a number of Katrina victims who had relocated from New Orleans to The Ripley House. These former New Orleans residents were staffing the Ripley House's new "stay connected" program that allows email set-up and cellular telephone communication between victims and their families separated in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Some of the funds raised by UJC have been designated to rebuild community infrastructure, including federation buildings, day schools, and synagogues severely damaged by the storm. Other funds will be used to rebuild Jewish life in the affected areas and re-attract those who were evacuated to places across the country.

UJC is an organization with a long history in effectively forming public-private partnerships. A key to that partnership over the years has been an on-going dialogue with civic and community leaders about the issues that citizens deal with day-to-day and during a national disaster. In preparation for the week long site tour, UJC networked with the Congressional delegation and the Governor's office of Mississippi, as well as the offices of the Mayors in Baton Rouge,

Louisiana, and Houston. First, UJC invited representatives from federal, state, and local government offices as well as community leaders and clergy to meet in Gulfport, Mississippi; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; and New Orleans, Louisiana. The two main topics of discussion at these small forums were the current status of the Gulf Coast region devastated by Hurricane Katrina and in particular how to begin to restore the social fabric of the Gulf Coast communities. Secondly, the eight-member site team toured on foot and by bus towns and cities now in ruins with destroyed highways/streets, businesses, recreation/tourist areas, and suburbs/residential areas that form our nations' Gulf Coast communities.

We also toured Gulf Coast-based FEMA facilities and a trailer park (a "FEMA-Ville") where some hurricane victims and their families currently reside. In addition, the UJC site team met with hurricane victims who volunteered to share their personal stories of how they survived and had relocated to other towns, cities, and states. The hurricane victims also shared their views on whether they had plans to return to their respective communities and begin rebuilding their homes and lives. The hurricane victims gave first-hand accounts of the hours leading up to Hurricane Katrina making land fall along our nation's Gulf Coast region and the aftermath they personally confronted later once Hurricane Katrina dissipated. The stories -- and there were AND continue to be many experienced by native Gulf Coast residents -- reveal the initial horror and desperation in the wake of a national disaster.

A more effective response can be achieved to ensure prompt relief in a major national disaster. We recommend that the following action steps be adopted, which can lead to a more effective partnership between local, state, and federal governments and community-based organizations:

- Form a "Disaster Task Force" with representatives from government and community-based organizations to assess needs, guide funding, identify gaps and solve problems;
- Devise a match-up system for local, state, and federal First Responders with community-based organizations as partners to aid relief efforts
- Maintain an open and ongoing dialogue throughout the disaster to establish priorities for needs and funding and eliminate duplication;
- Coordinate essential recovery services and assign roles by dividing duties between government officials and community-based organizations;
- Publicize guidelines with respect to publicly and privately-available housing and set-up a registry of available housing;

- Publicize locations of mass feeding centers;
- Establish emergency toll-free hotlines for disaster victims and share the telephone numbers with community-based organizations to circulate;
- Publicize information and referrals phone numbers for health and human services such as medical treatment/evaluation and counseling;
- Expand licensure waivers for medical, dental, and counseling professionals, so that they are able to give aid in emergency situations in states where they are not licensed;
- Expand guidelines for mortgage and utility payments for homeowners and leasing costs for renters;
- Establish procedures whereby evacuees are able to bring their pets with them and/or establish sufficient facilities for sheltering pets; and,
- Facilitate an organized distribution of in-kind donations by establishing a centralized location for food, clothing and other supplies.

There is a critical need to match generosity with distribution in a national disaster. Local, state, and federal governments working with community-based organizations can design an efficient system to meet basic needs and address disbursement in a national disaster.

UJC has a strong interest in a more effective public-private partnership and would like to continue to work with local, state, and federal governments to aid a more effective response to a national disaster. I saw evidence of human kindness, compassion, acts of courage, and outreach between diverse communities. I was heartened, for the stories I heard and what I witnessed first-hand reflect the true character and spirit of our nation's communities. They are strong, they are resilient, and they can be greatly helped and strengthened by a structured partnership with regular and concise communication between local, state, and federal governments and community-based organizations.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present the UJC story.