

November 29, 2007

State of New York
Division of the Budget
Jeffrey Gordon

Dear Mr. Gordon:

I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of Safe Horizon, the nation's leading victim's assistance organization. We are writing to support the testimony of the Human Services Council and their request for funding from the State for disaster preparedness.

Collaboration among not-for-profit agencies and the strengthening of partnerships with government agencies is essential to providing comprehensive disaster-related services to New Yorkers. Since 9/11 and other recent major disasters, organizations here in New York City have accepted the idea that no one organization can do it alone, and all sectors need to work together—we all need to be part of the equation.

In recent years, increased focus and attention on the not-for-profit sector has forced greater levels of collaboration. Although great strides have been made, funding has not kept pace with the increased level of responsibility. With the necessary financial resources, the not-for-profit sector will be able to help New Yorkers when they need it most.

New Yorkers know how important the services provided by not-for-profit agencies were after 9/11, and we have seen in the Gulf Coast and in other disasters how devastating it can be if there are not adequate services available. It is critical that when considering the impact on infrastructure and how to restore bridges and roads, we also consider the impact on people and how to rebuild lives. We encourage the State of New York to ensure the ability of human services agencies to meet the needs of people by providing funding of \$500,000 to the Human Services Council of New York City (HSC) to implement coordinated not-for-profit disaster preparedness in this high-risk area of the State. Funds are also being sought from local government and philanthropic sources, but State support is essential.

In the weeks, months, and years after the initial impact of a disaster, human services need to be linked together in an overall recovery effort, supported by critical systems such as assessment, technology tools, volunteers, and financial resources. A coordinated recovery effort on the part of the not-for-profit sector requires detailed, advanced, and coordinated planning, and it requires that the human services agencies have the capacity to respond. We know that not-for-profit agencies can and will respond to assist in a large-scale disaster in New York City. A multi-agency response will be much more effective if not-for-profit agencies both participate in coordinated planning and preparedness efforts and prepare their own agencies to cope with disaster.

Safe Horizon has worked in partnership with the Human Services Council, government, and other not-for-profit human services agencies to implement mechanisms for collaborative planning. Agencies in New York are much better prepared to coordinate services for people impacted by disaster than we were two years ago. Nonetheless, it is critical that this planning continues and additional resources are obtained to ensure sustainability. Comprehensive disaster planning cannot be implemented without the time and resources of dedicated staff, knowledgeable in the areas of emergency management and disaster planning and recovery. With sustained funding to HSC from New York State, not-for-profit agencies could ensure not only that they coordinate with each other, but also that their efforts are integrated into state and local government planning. It is critical that a public/not-for-profit partnership be sustained to help New Yorkers recover from major disaster.

We ask that you consider funding for HSC that will:

- Ensure that the not-for-profit human services sector is better prepared to provide effective, efficient, and compassionate recovery services after disaster, through collaborative planning.
- Enhance the capacity of not-for-profit service providers to cope with, respond to, and recover from disasters, through expanding the participation of community-based organizations in collaborative disaster planning and in developing agency-based continuity plans.

We know that the sector will need to respond after the next major disaster in conjunction with New York State and local authorities. We must also ensure that the sector has the capacity to meet that need. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Scott E. Millstein
Interim Chief Executive Officer