



DISASTER ADVOCACY

NYDIS works to ensure that the concerns of faith communities and the needs of present and future disaster survivors are addressed on a governmental and legislative level. Specifically, NYDIS strives to bring attention to the needs of under-resourced communities through advocacy, education, and when appropriate, legislative reform.

Each year, the NYDIS Board of Directors sets five Advocacy Priorities, which the Advocacy Committee and staff use to guide Advocacy Program initiatives of NYDIS and its members. In 2008, NYDIS will continue to collaborate with partner agencies to:

- **PREPARE** editorials and research reports
- **HOST** inter-agency conferences and educational events
- **MEDIATE** dialogue between faith, government, and community leaders
- **ORGANIZE** community forums and press conferences

NYDIS's ADVOCACY PRIORITIES FOR 2008-2009

1. PERMANENT FUNDING TO SUSTAIN MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR 9/11 HEALTH-IMPACTED POPULATIONS

NYDIS acknowledges the unmet health needs of World Trade Center rescue, recovery, restoration, and clean-up workers and volunteers, community residents, office re-occupants, and area students who have developed or might develop health problems directly related to World Trade Center physical and psychological exposures. NYDIS supports the allocation of significant local, state, and federal resources to address health concerns of these 9/11 health-impacted persons. In 2008, NYDIS continues to support passage of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, legislation introduced by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), and Congressman Vito Fossella (R-NY). This legislation would ensure that sufficient funding is made available to extend the "Centers of Excellence" medical and mental health programs permanently.

2. INCREASED RESOURCES TO NONPROFIT AND FAITH-BASED DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

NYDIS advocates for resources to build the capacity of nonprofit and faith-based human service providers in preparing for their increasing role in disaster response, relief and long-term recovery. We have supported coordination of diverse faith communities through the Lower Manhattan Clergy Coalition and through the HOWCALM™ program and www.nydis.org. In 2008, NYDIS will continue to serve as a forum for lessons learned and future planning, working to promote best practices among our members and community partners through outreach and hosting workshops and conferences.

3. MEETING EVOLVING NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY DISASTER

NYDIS works closely with community and faith-based organizations to advocate for the persisting recovery needs of persons impacted by natural and man-made disasters and their families, with special attention to the under-served. Specifically, NYDIS has worked with its partners, including the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) and the United Church of Christ National Disaster Ministries, support housing and job program proposals for low-income communities impacted by human-caused and natural disasters. For example, in 2005 NYDIS advanced a common agenda of directing the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's (LMDC) \$800 million in unrestricted funds to vulnerable communities affected by 9/11.

Through hosting and participating in conferences, dialogues, organizing community partnerships, and other initiatives, NYDIS supports the coordination of recovery services and disaster preparedness planning. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, evacuees were relocated throughout the USA, with at least 2,700 in New York City in 2005-6. There continue to be serious concerns regarding the limited scope of disaster recovery and mental health services available to affected populations.

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4. BACKLASH MITIGATION POLICIES & LEGISLATION

NYDIS works in partnership with faith-based organizations and faith communities to ensure that the effects of disaster are not compounded by responses that reflect discrimination or prejudice by private or public action. NYDIS and its members are concerned that previous domestic disasters have been used to justify state and federal legislation and policies that enact restrictions on civil liberties and due process as well as immigrant eligibility for benefits.

NYDIS and its members advocate for legislation, policies, and programs that seek to prevent backlash and discrimination against minorities, regardless of immigration status or religion, specifically after a disaster. In particular, NYDIS calls upon government to institutionalize disaster preparation, response, and recovery plans that reflect an effort to address and mitigate disaster-related bias or discrimination.

As people and communities of faith, NYDIS and its members oppose the violation of human rights, including civil rights. Addressing or mitigating social injustices will continue to be incorporated into all of NYDIS's recovery, advocacy, and preparedness programs.

5. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND LEGISLATION ADDRESSING DISASTER ASSISTANCE

FEDERAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Some Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs vital to New York's recovery after 9/11 have been restricted or no longer exist for relief in future disasters. These programs provided aid for emergency and temporary housing, repair costs, furniture, funeral, medical and dental needs, and eviction and foreclosure prevention. NYDIS advocates for legislative reform that fully restores those programs, including:

■ RENTAL ASSISTANCE:

Previously available for up to 18 months, now assistance for alternative rental after a home is damaged is also subject to an overall \$28,800 cash assistance cap on all combined FEMA assistance. This is especially punitive for large families, those who live in high rent areas, and those who may have needed funeral or other assistance, because rental assistance stops when the cash assistance cap is reached. Some families will receive assistance for repairs, leaving little aid to cover the costs of temporary housing. Larger families with more costly temporary housing needs will use up their allocated funds before their homes are ready for re-habitation, and be forced to use their repair money for temporary rent. This is especially problematic in high-rent areas such as Manhattan. This need is too massive to be handled by voluntary or local government agencies.

Recommendation: Restore 18-month maximum, not subject to cash assistance cap.

■ EVICTION AND FORECLOSURE PREVENTION:

Called "Mortgage and Rental Assistance (MRA)," this was the most important FEMA relief program in New York City following 9/11. Some 16,500 households, which lost jobs and were facing eviction or foreclosure as a result of the attack, had their rents and mortgages paid by FEMA for up to 18 months, at a total cost of \$200 million. This program was eliminated in November 2002. Since then, this important safety net has been tragically unavailable, most egregiously in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Here in New York, there are no voluntary, state or local government funds to prevent disaster-caused eviction and foreclosure.

Recommendation: Restore the program.

■ FEMA QUALIFYING IMMIGRANT STATUS:

Immigrants are among the most vulnerable to disaster and are often denied other forms of public assistance. In recent years, FEMA assistance has become more restricted based on immigration status. Access to humanitarian disaster services is a fundamental human right, articulated in the standards of the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons, Principles 3 and 4: "National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction. Internally displaced persons have the right to request and to receive protection and humanitarian assistance from these authorities."

Recommendation: Extend basic emergency FEMA disaster relief, temporary housing, health and other humanitarian aid to all in need without regard to legal immigration status.

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FAITH COMMUNITIES BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR READINESS, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY

