



Testimony of Jacob Cooper
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Before the New York City Council Fire and Emergency Management Committee
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Good morning Chair Borelli, and members of the New York City Council. I am Jake Cooper, Deputy Commissioner for Readiness at New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). I am joined by my colleague Johanna Conroy, Assistant Commissioner for Interagency Operations. We are pleased to be here to discuss emergency planning for the City of New York.

New York City Emergency Management helps New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies through preparedness, education, and response. The agency is responsible for coordinating citywide emergency planning and response for all types and scales of emergencies. It is staffed by more than 200 dedicated professionals with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, including individuals assigned from other City agencies.

We have been fully activated for COVID-19 for almost one year. During this time, there have been multiple overlapping activations such as heat emergencies, winter weather, snowstorms, Tropical Storm Isaias, and smaller emergencies that required interagency coordination including building collapses, fires, infrastructure incidents, water main breaks, and other events. Additionally, Emergency Management has assisted with large-scale programs such as GetFood, GetCool, and the Vaccine Command Center. For the first time ever, we have run operations and emergencies mostly virtual, although many staff have worked in person and, like everyone else in the city, we have not been immune to the personal and devastating impacts of COVID-19. Allow me a moment to express my gratitude to the workers of Emergency Management, who have literally worked around the clock over the past year in an unending activation cycle, while also continuing our non-emergency work, mandates, and responsibilities as well. For a small agency this is no small feat and we should all be grateful and thankful for the dedication and commitment of the City's emergency managers.

Let me now discuss how the agency coordinates planning efforts. As we all know, every emergency can create new and unforeseen conditions. Emergency Management is responsible for the development, maintenance, and oversight of 150 planning documents – spanning plans, protocols, field guides, and standard operating procedures – for multiple natural and man-made hazards. Plans are either operation-specific, such as debris management; or hazard-specific, such as the *New York City Coastal Storm Plan*. They include citywide objectives for managing the incident, logistical resource needs and operations, templates for interagency coordination and data management, and checklists for key tasks and actions. These plans include coordinated roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders — primarily City agencies — for these events formalized under the Citywide Incident Management System or CIMS. CIMS relies on assigning responsibility in particular emergencies based on an agency's core competency. For example,

NYPD is responsible for law enforcement and investigating terrorism, FDNY is responsible for fire suppression, Sanitation is responsible for snow and garbage removal, and DOHMH is responsible for public health, pandemics, etc. This year the City is updating CIMS in a multi-agency and, comprehensive effort.

Emergency Management's planning process is one of collaboration and coordination. We follow a phased approach: initiate, develop, finalize, and distribute and socialize.

- In the initiation phase, we identify planning needs and relevant stakeholders. This can include City agencies, state and federal government partners, private sector partners, and non-profit partners.
- In the development phase, we work closely with relevant City agencies and other stakeholders to create document objectives, scope, and detailed operations. Emergency Management coordinates and conducts many interagency planning meetings to accomplish this work.
- In the finalization phase, we build document components and circulate for review amongst internal and external partners.
- In the distribution and socialization phases, we internally publish the documents and distribute to internal and external stakeholders. Planning documents are not publicized or made public due to the sensitive nature of many tactical operations included within them. Information on locations of staging areas, location of key resources, and specific capabilities of agencies are privileged information and are not beneficial for public consumption.

All of this planning requires testing and training to make plans that are operational, usable, and ready to go. We have a robust training and exercise program to build capacity for implementation. We exercise our plans consistently with all stakeholders. Last year, despite the pandemic, and having to move our EOC activities virtually, Emergency Management held 21 different exercises that tested parts or the entirety of a plan. Planning documents are reviewed yearly, with updates coming at least once every three years. Updates come about for a number of reasons, including threat trends, agency priorities, stakeholder priorities and other factors. Our plans are meant to serve as a guide—a living document, rather than a static one—on how to respond to a particular emergency; given that every emergency is different, plans are designed to be scalable, and have different elements activated or not based on need.

Coupled with trainings and exercises, part of Emergency Management's continuous improvement efforts is the evaluation of emergency responses and activations through a multiagency assessment process called an After-Action Review. This includes fact-finding through post-emergency debrief sessions, surveys, interviews, and document reviews leading to an after-action report with recommendations for improvement; then implementing recommended response improvements.

Emergency planning in New York City incorporates multiple levels of coordination, collaboration, and cooperation; I am happy to discuss further during your questions. Now I will speak briefly about the legislation we are hearing today.

Regarding Introductions 849-2018, 1949-2020, and 1987-2020, we look forward to working with you to satisfy the intent of these bills, and further inform the Council about how we plan for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. We already share information on our plans and multiple plans themselves with the Council based on legislation passed after Hurricane Sandy. As

previously noted, while we share overall information about how the City plans for emergencies on our website for the public, we do not publish the actual plans as they contain sensitive information from partner agencies who may not collaborate with us if they know their details would be made public, especially those with sensitive agency operations, or those outside the city government structure. However, we do have built-in public assessment in certain components, such as our yearly public hearings conducted by the Disability, Access, and Functional Needs (DAFN) unit with members of the DAFN community to better inform our emergency planning surrounding this community.

In reference to Introduction 2057-2020, which creates an emergency student food plan, the NYC Department of Education possesses the core competency for feeding students, which they have carried out continuously through the COVID-19 emergency. DOE and the Mayor's Office of Food Policy should be brought into discussions on this bill and where it best fits.

In reference to Introduction 2088, which requires Emergency Management to report on the City's preparedness and response to citywide public health emergencies, this is likely better handled by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, given their expertise. We are happy to have broader discussions about informing the Council on our planning; however, we are not the appropriate subject matter experts to report on this type of emergency.

Thank you for allowing us to inform the public on how Emergency Management plans for emergencies, and to comment on this legislation. As you can see, planning for emergencies is a complex endeavor requiring constant collaboration, consultation, and coordination. We are extraordinarily proud of the work we have done to plan for emergencies in NYC while realizing that improvement is an ever-present goal. As an agency it is our core mission to plan for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. We take those responsibilities very seriously, and look forward to your questions and comments. Thank you.