

Statement of Valerie Keller Chief Executive Officer The Outreach Center

Before the joint hearing of the House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response And the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs' Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery

"Lessons Learned: Ensuring the Delivery of Donated Goods to Survivors of Catastrophes"

Washington, DC July 24, 2008 I would like to thank the chairpersons and the distinguished members of the committees for the opportunity to appear before you. I am Valerie Keller, CEO of Outreach Center, a nonprofit based in south-central Louisiana, and I serve as a member of the Louisiana Recovery Authority's Housing Task Force and as co-chair of the Louisiana Supportive Housing Coalition and of the Louisiana Advocacy Coalition for Housing and Homelessness. We appreciate Congress' continued support and attention to Gulf Coast recovery and your commitment to looking critically at our national systems for response and recovery so that our country is better prepared to aid its citizens in future times of crisis.

Today, I share with you information on the current need for housing and supplies along the Gulf Coast following the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Rita almost three years ago, in the hopes of informing your analysis of how critically-needed supplies were not delivered to those who needed them and your efforts to prevent such unfortunate situations from occurring in future disasters.

This testimony focuses on three main points:

Our work helping families access housing and the supplies they need for self-sufficiency and our efforts working with FEMA and other federal/state agencies

The ongoing needs on the ground across Louisiana's still-suffering coast and specifically focusing on the oft-overlooked Hurricane Rita impacted region

The impact of the recent CNN story and the Congressional and LRA outreach directing long-needed supplies to help these families still struggling to rebuild and recover.

I will speak to those first two points first—our work providing services and the ongoing needs on the ground –to set the stage on why the recovery supplies we're discussing today were and are much-needed.

The Outreach Center is a grassroots nonprofit human services organization with a proven track record of delivering effective services to people in crisis. Founded in 1990 and serving eight (8) parishes, the Center utilizes a comprehensive services model designed to help people climb from rock-bottom to obtain safe housing, meaningful employment, optimal physical and mental health, and a sense of self-respect, hope and dignity. Its broad scope of services encompass a complete continuum of care that includes an extensive housing and case management program, licensed addiction and mental health treatment center, social enterprises, a women's and children's shelter, a day shelter, and a food and supply distribution center. In addition, the Center is now developing mixed-income housing and catalyzing urban revitalization.

The Detireache Center and supportive serisclis twith the deals and familiars the third evake of Hurricanes Katrina & Rita the Outreach Center established the Transitional Recovery Action Center for Katrina/Rita (TRACK) based on the best practice "housing first" model to help hundreds of displaced families find solutions and access to housing, transportation, employment, and supportive services – rebuilding and empowering one life at a time.

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ermath of the storms the Center coordinated the distribution of goods from international relief organizations around the world, businesses, and government agencies giving more than 800,000 pounds of food, personal care items and medical supplies valued at \$2 million to more than 6,000 evacuees. Displaced families unsure of where or how to begin rebuilding their shattered lives turned to the Outreach Center and got the help they needed. treach Center and got the help they needed. reach Center and got the help they needed.

Since the storms even when other relief and emergency response efforts faded away, community-based nonprofits have continued to serve the overwhelming needs of their neighbors while scrapping together resources. Our case managers are still working one-on-one with displaced individuals and families to assess their needs and establish an action plan to address each need, including housing, employment, transportation, mental health, substance abuse, education/job htsillstrinipibs,inhildcstraphegolscreekstheriompauteit/saroiliesctSinse War guaste29np005ed/enlored han 50t their jobse including case management and assistance accessing housing, employment, transportation, government benefits to 1,045 households, 2,367 individuals.

Resources are scarce and our agency is currently leveraging local dollars with some funding from the Social Services Block Grant administered through the LA State Department of Social Services (DRS) helosing Grant and the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation Displaced Family and Rapid Re-housing Grant and the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation Displaced Family - Housing Assistance Fund. These funds will aid approximately 300 displaced families in the Hurricane Rita-impacted parishes and FEMA trailer parks to obtain rental and utility assistance for up to a year. Since 2005 we have been working with FEMA, HUD, state agencies and nonprofits to ensure that services are not duplicated for the same families and that gaps are filled as people exit transitional housing and try to secure permanent housing.

In our work with hurricane evacuees, we have helped to place many clients in permanent Hersi Many from our clients have accessed HUD's Katrina Disaster Housing Assistance Program (KDHAP) and Disaster Voucher Program (DVP) rental subsidies, part of which pays a portion of their rent, and incrementally pays less and less, leaving the evacuee to pay more and more. In our experience this program has unfortunately not been a long term solution for most hurricane impacted families, as they are still often unable to pay their rent at the increased market rates and thus are unable to maintain permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

Louisiana, like the rest of the nation, was facing an affordable housing crisis pre-Katrina and Rita; however, an entirely new housing crisis was created when the hurricanes devastated south Louisiana in the fall of 2005, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of residents. One of the biggest challenges facing evacuees was, and still is, securing safe and affordable housing floothetio vars, it lease Whidelman variablings to vector incontrate the intendition that the intendition and the impact on housing availability has been substantial. South central Louisiana, a region best known nationally for its Cajun food and Zydeco and Cajun music, was the area hardest hit by Hurricane Rita also served as host communities for people resettling after Hurricane Katrina.

In this region the rent for one and two bedroom units increased 30% since the storms and a minimum wage worker now has to work 73 hours per week to afford a one bedroom and 81 hours per week to be able to afford a two bedroom apartment for a family.

Although these storms took a tremendous toll on all in their path, low to moderate-income individuals were disproportionately affected, with the storms severely compounding problems

that already existed. Current needs assessments reveal the top issue for hurricane-impacted

till primarily a lack of affordable housing. As the Outreach Center continues to see a large ill primarily a lack of affordable housing. As the Outreach Center continues to see a large number of families from the hurricane Rita impacted areas, it is obvious that they have many outstanding basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and transportation. They need help accessing affordable housing, rental and security deposit assistance, building materials, transportation, food, employment, legal counsel, household items, furniture, infant supplies, cleaning supplies, school supplies and school uniforms.

l supplies and school uniforms.

In my capacity as co-chair of the Louisiana Supportive Housing Coalition representing more than 300 organizations across the state, I have had the honor of working closely with Senator Landrieu, and with the support of our delegation and Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal, to secure \$73 million for 3,000 supportive housing vouchers--2,000 of which will be used to house disabled and homeless people in the New Orleans region, while 1,000 of the vouchers to help people obtain housing in the other hurricane-impacted areas.

Three years later the needs are very much on-going but the resources to meet those needs are scarcy dust people ademakle established. When sufficiently the three transfer of three impactably families and use three three transfer to the transfer extend and all sphere to families three three transfer further three transfer to the transfer extend and all sphere to families three three transfer furthisting in the three transfer to the transfer extends and all sphere to families three transfer furthisting in the transfer extends and three transfer extends and three transfer furthisting in the transfer extends and three transfer extends and three transfer furthisting in the tra

We are tremendously grateful to Senator Landrieu and the Louisiana Recovery Authority for phonical Methatumphietojuarkums aweaks again and since themetheesal supplies kansas. We were able to secure these supplies just two weeks ago and since then the calls for assistance have been pouring in from families needing supplies and other agencies looking to help people they are serving. We've talked to many of our nonprofit partners who are equally as this applies saturped established the strategies supplied extring what him was elious estimates in the these supplies sat collecting dust in warehouses. If nonprofit service providers had even known it was available – if FEMA had simply communicated the existence of these criticallyneeded resources—we would have jumped through whatever hoops necessary to ask for it and get it to people we're serving who need them so desperately.

With rental assistance to help bridge the affordable housing gap and with household supplies providing parstable application, inclinical and hamiliated and heater properties the application, and be able to red to pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to ed to pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to d to pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to afford to pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to afford to pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to afford to pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to afford o pursue employment, education for their children, maintain their health, and be able to afford

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