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The devastation wrought by Superstorm Sandy will continue to bring major challenges to the New York region and its Jewish community. Picture: Torah scrolls being dried in Long Beach.

The Jewish community values the support of the New York congressional delegation and the many initiatives sponsored by our representatives and senators. These measures reflect a deep and abiding commitment to issues of concern to the Jewish community. As we take stock of our mutual concerns and priorities, we ask Congress to take note of the following issues, supported by a broad consensus in the Jewish community and considered to be high on our agenda.

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Prime Minister Netanyahu met with Congressional leaders during his March, 2012 visit to Washington, DC and stressed Congress' bipartisan support for Israel. Photo credit: ©2012 all rights reserved by Prime Minister of Israel.

THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

In March, 2012, President Barack Obama described the historic nature of U.S.-Israel relations as, “a bond that is based not only on our mutual security interests and economic interests, but is also based on common values and the incredible people-to-people contacts that we have between our two countries.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded that, “The alliance between our two countries is deeply appreciated by me and by everyone in Israel. And I think that, as you said, when Americans look around the Middle East today, they see one reliable, stable, faithful ally of the United States, and that’s the democracy of Israel.” After a series of warm meetings on Capitol Hill the next day the Prime Minister noted, “this remarkable display of solidarity here in the Congress of the United States, it is bipartisan...”

In the U.S., support for Israel is widespread. Multiple public opinion polls report that a majority of American voters continue to show strong backing for the Jewish state, reflecting Israel’s special status as a fellow democracy and America’s closest ally in the Middle East.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Over the past year, the joint development of military technology proved its effectiveness, and joint training exercises expanded: both are hallmarks of the unprecedented strategic partnership between the United

States and Israel. Israeli emergency rescue techniques, innovative tactics and equipment all help to protect U.S. troops in harm’s way.

The Arrow, David’s Sling, and Iron Dome systems — jointly developed by U.S. and Israeli contractors — are among the world’s most sophisticated anti-missile shields. In 2012, the Austere Challenge exercise included 3,500 U.S. personnel with more than 1,000 deployed to Israel. A similar number of IDF personnel participated. The exercises improve the interoperability of the U.S. and Israeli militaries. During the exercises, record numbers of U.S. Army soldiers, Marines and Israeli troops participated in joint urban warfare drills and missile defense simulations. We applaud these efforts to ensure the safety and security of both Americans and Israelis.

SECURITY ASSISTANCE

As Andrew Shapiro, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, stated, “The most direct tool that the United States uses to ensure Israel’s qualitative military edge is security assistance.” Challenges ranging from the potential of a nuclear-armed Iran to the expanding military capabilities of the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah make it increasingly difficult and expensive for Israel to support its defense spending without security assistance. We applaud the Administration and Congress for advancing the *United States-Israel Enhanced Security Cooperation Act*

of 2012 to help secure Israel's qualitative military edge in the Middle East.

We would also like to thank the Administration for its continued financial support in developing the Iron Dome system, including an additional \$70 million dollars this summer, on top of the \$205 million previously allocated for FY2012. Furthermore, we thank Congress for recent passage of the *National Defense Authorization Act*, allocating \$211 million for the Iron Dome system and \$267 million in advanced missile defense programs (including Arrow and David's Sling). JCRC-NY is grateful to the Administration for deploying an advanced radar system to provide Israel with early warning of incoming missiles.

Since its deployment in Israel, the Iron Dome has protected millions of Israeli civilians from escalating rocket attacks emanating from Gaza. With an 85% success rate during Operation Pillar of Defense, the investment has proven invaluable. Building on this success, American and Israeli military engineers are co-developing the Arrow-3 interceptor to rebuff long range ballistic missile attacks; and are upgrading Israel's Patriot Air and Missile Defense System.

In the wake of Operation Pillar of Defense, we appreciate Congress' continued and unwavering support for the Jewish state. We look forward to the passage of the annual foreign aid bill for FY2013, containing the Pentagon's recent proposal to provide Israel with an additional \$647 million. This package includes nearly \$3.1 billion in security assistance to Israel in the fifth year of a 10-year U.S.-Israel security agreement, signed in 2007. We applaud what Former Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton called America's "unshakable commitment to Israel's security," and thank our congressional delegation for the work already done and urge the members to safeguard the program during future budget negotiations.

IRAN

This year, Iran's expanding illicit nuclear program, its abysmal human rights record, and its continued support of international terrorist organizations solidified its status as a pariah state. Its continued recalcitrance makes Iran the pre-eminent foreign policy and national security conundrum facing the United States and the international community. We applaud the Administration, as well as leaders in Congress, for understanding that the unique challenge posed by Iran demands a uniquely flexible

policy response that keeps all options on the table. As President Obama has made clear, "Make no mistake: A nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained... the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon." As Israeli President Shimon Peres observed, "Israel cannot solve the problem alone."

As Iran continues to heighten tensions in the region, nearly all of its neighbors are deeply concerned about Iran's efforts to play the role of regional hegemon. It is clear that Iran's reckless behavior poses a threat to the United States, the Middle East more generally, and the broader international community. This threat has been perfectly encapsulated by Iran's continuing support for the Syrian regime, its supplying of Hamas and Hezbollah with sophisticated weaponry, and its continuous meddling in the affairs of its neighbors.

NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Despite robust efforts by the Obama Administration, the United States Congress, our European and Asian allies, and international organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran continues to pursue its illicit nuclear program. Iran has now installed over 25,000 centrifuges at its Natanz enrichment plant and nearly 2,800 at the Fordow enrichment plant, a significant increase over the past year. The IAEA estimates that Iran has produced as much as 140kg of uranium enriched to 20%. So processed, uranium is only a small step from becoming bomb grade material.

The reality of Iran's continuing efforts in this regard was brought to the world's attention again this past November when the IAEA released its most recent report. This report outlined continued Iranian stonewalling on access to key sites, including the Parchin facility that the IAEA has repeatedly identified as the location of a suspected weapons development program. The IAEA suspects Iranian activities at this site "specific to nuclear weapons" include the modeling of nuclear explosions and the development of warhead designs. The IAEA has expressed concerns that this site has undergone extensive cleanup efforts in recent months, likely in an effort to hide illicit activities in the event that the IAEA is eventually granted access.

In September 2012, the Senate passed *S.J. Res. 41*, declaring that "containment" of a nuclear armed Iran is not a viable option. We thank Congress and the Administration for their steadfast focus on this critical issue. Only through such combined efforts can we hope to see an end to the Iranian regime's illicit nuclear program.

MISSILE DEVELOPMENT

The combination of Iran's nuclear progress along with continuing efforts to improve the capabilities of the country's medium and long-range missiles escalates the threat to the entire region. Iran's growing expertise in the construction and deployment of sophisticated missile systems was recently evidenced by North Korea's (DPRK) launch of a primitive satellite into orbit. Iran's material assistance was a crucial element of the DPRK's first successful satellite launch. This cooperation with another pariah state demonstrates the clear weapons technology proliferation threat posed by the Iranian regime. Currently, it maintains weapons with a range of up to 1,100 kilometers and the regime is testing additional designs that could travel up to 2,400 km, bringing American allies in Israel, Turkey, the Persian Gulf, and American forces deployed throughout the region into striking distance.

SANCTIONS

We applaud Congress's passage of the *National Defense Authorization Act*, intensifying penalties applied to those continuing to do business with the Iranian regime, and the *Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012*, tightening sanctions on the Iranian petroleum, petrochemical, insurance, and shipping industries.

The ongoing sanctions efforts are having a profound impact on the Iranian economy. We commend the Administration for imposing increasingly stringent sanctions on Iran's petrochemical and financial industries and Congress' passage of the strongest legislation ever targeting Iran's Central Bank. These efforts, combined with EU sanctions and sharp import cuts by American allies in Asia, have severely damaged Iran's ability to access international oil markets, demonstrated by the sharp decline in Iranian crude oil sales, with exports down nearly 50% year-on-year from 2011. Iran now produces less crude oil than it did 20 years ago.

Sanctions programs are a blow to both Iran's economy and to its internal politics. Oil, the country's prime export, is being sold at a discount when a buyer can be found. In October, the range of international sanctions efforts culminated in a full-blown Iranian currency crisis. The value of the Iranian rial collapsed, and the country became one of the few to experience "hyperinflation" (defined as an inflation rate of over 50% a month) in the 21st century. The price of staple goods skyrocketed and the collapse of the exchange value of the rial makes imports prohibitively expensive. At the same time internal battles over a range of issues, including the state of the economy, are a continuing source of division between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his onetime supporters within the clerical establishment.

We applaud the continuing resolve of both Congress and the Administration. Until Iran discontinues its nuclear program, JCRC-NY urges the continue imposition of crippling sanctions on the Iranian regime and to keep all options on the table.

HUMAN RIGHTS

JCRC-NY applauds the commitment of the Administration to advancing the cause of human rights in Iran. We also strongly support the efforts of the United Nation's new Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Ahmed Shaheed, to shed light on Iran's deteriorating human rights situation. Regrettably, Mr. Shaheed has been denied access to Iran and to the unknown numbers of Iranians suffering at the hands of the regime. The Iranian regime continues to systematically discriminate against women, ethnic and religious minorities, and a range of political dissidents, including human rights defenders like Nasrin Sotoudeh and artists like Jafar Panahi. Iran also maintained a horrific rate of executions during 2012 — 478 known executions, with potentially hundreds more secret ones. In response to these continuing abuses, we welcomed the Administration's imposition of sanctions against the Revolutionary Guard's Cyber Defense Command, Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Law Enforcement Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Internet service provider Datak Telecom.

We continue to hope for the speedy release of former FBI agent Bob Levinson, who has been held in Iran for over four years by an undetermined group.

SPONSORING TERRORISM

According to the U.S. State Department, Iran continues to be the world's leading state sponsor of terror, with a worldwide reach. This support for international terrorism is most pronounced in the Middle East. Iran actively undermines regional stability through its support for Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as various militant groups in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are particularly disturbed by indications that Iran established listening posts on the Syrian-Israeli border, in order to supply Hezbollah with intelligence information on Israel.

Iran's destructive reach was evident around the world, including: the Iran-designed Fajr-5 missiles fired at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv from Gaza during Operation Pillar of Defense; the bombing of Israeli diplomatic missions and personnel in India, Georgia, and Thailand; the murder of Israeli civilians in Bulgaria; and in a new development, the increasing frequency of cyber-attacks against American interests, allies and banks.

Iran continues to cultivate ties with anti-American leaders in Latin America (especially Hugo Chavez in Venezuela) and Africa (Omar al-Bashir in Sudan) in an attempt to break its international isolation and damage America's interests abroad. Evidence has also surfaced of Iran's increasingly prevalent role in the small-arms trade in Africa. Iranian manufactured weaponry and ammunition have played a deadly role in many of the continent's ongoing violent conflicts.

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Israel needs a partner for peace. Unfortunately, throughout much of the past year, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) leadership has consistently left Israel waiting — unrequited — at the negotiating table. As Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated, a true and lasting “peace will be achieved only through direct negotiations” and “painful concessions” from each party. The peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and the unilateral withdrawals from Gaza and Lebanon prove that Israel is ready to take dramatic and painful risks in pursuit of peace.

In November 2012, ignoring pleas from the United States and Israel, the PA asked the United Nations General Assembly to vote on upgrading its status to “nonmember observer state.” This vote passed with the support of 138 countries, whereas nine countries opposed the bid and 41 countries abstained from voting. While the Israeli government endorses the right of the Palestinian people to a state of their own, peace and reconciliation can only be achieved through direct, bilateral negotiations between the two parties. Prime Minister Netanyahu used his 2012 UN General Assembly speech to emphasize as much, saying: “We have to sit together, negotiate together, and reach a mutual compromise, in which a demilitarized Palestinian state recognizes the one and only Jewish State. Israel wants to see a Middle East of progress and peace.”

Unilateral moves, like the recent PA bid at the UN, only serve as an obstacle to establishing a meaningful peace agreement. In anticipation of the PA bid at the UN, JCRC-NY delivered a petition to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The petition — with over 110,000 signatures — called for immediate direct negotiations. Unilateral declarations, and the counterproductive Palestinian admission to UNESCO or other UN bodies, will not lead to peace. Rather, these efforts pose setbacks to the peace process and fail to address Israel's legitimate concerns that Palestinians will pursue perverse war crimes charges against Israel in the International Criminal Court. We are thankful

for Congress' strong response to the UN bid, including a bipartisan letter circulated by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Howard Berman, Edward Royce and Eliot Engel and signed by 240 members of the House of Representatives; which called on President Obama to condemn PA leadership.

The Jewish community applauds President Obama and Former Secretary of State Clinton for their principled decision to vote against granting “nonmember observer state” status to the PA. In addition, we praise the Administration and Congress' condemnation of the UN's recent vote, and their ongoing commitment to direct negotiations.

Unfortunately, recent statements from Ramallah have not been reassuring. PA President Mahmoud Abbas stated his refusal to negotiate until Israel meets a variety of unacceptable preconditions. He has also threatened to dissolve the PA and end security arrangements required by the Oslo Accords. President Abbas' words are particularly frightening in light of threats of a third intifada, persistent and growing violence emanating from Gaza, and the Tel Aviv bus bombing that injured 28 Israeli civilians in November.

Congress should continue to pursue measures to urge President Abbas to end the climate of political deadlock and, in the words of President Obama, “pursue a two-state solution with a secure Israel next to an independent Palestine.” JCRC-NY continues to call for the immediate resumption of direct negotiations without preconditions.

GAZA AND HAMAS

Since Hamas took control of the Gaza strip in 2007, over 5,200 rockets and mortar shells have struck Israel. In the first 11 months of 2012 terrorists fired over 2,600 projectiles, nearly a four-fold increase from the number of attacks in 2011. Over a three day span in November Hamas indiscriminately launched over 120 rockets into Israel, leading to the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) Operation Pillar of Defense. During the eight-day conflict Hamas demonstrated its capability and determination to murder innocent Israeli civilians with the launching of over 1,500 rockets — including Iranian-supplied Fajr-5 rockets that brought both the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem areas into range. In contrast, Israel made every effort to avoid civilian casualties while targeting roughly 1,500 terrorist sites.

The White House pronouncements were clear: “There is no justification for the violence that Hamas and other terrorist organizations are employing against the people

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of Israel. We call on those responsible to stop these cowardly acts immediately. We support Israel's right to defend itself." We deeply appreciate the support for Israel demonstrated by President Obama, Congress, as well as international support from Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Australia during the operation.

The Iron Dome demonstrated the tremendous success of the U.S.-Israel partnership. The Iron Dome successfully intercepted 421 rockets that were fired into Israel during the operation, with a success rate of 85%. Due to the bilateral investments made in the missile defense system, Israel was able to avoid hundreds, if not thousands, of casualties.

We applaud Former Secretary of State Clinton's effort in brokering a ceasefire along with Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi. We hope that the calm will continue and that Hamas will not use the quiet as an opportunity to rearm itself.

A stark reminder of Hamas' intransigence was offered during a celebration of the organization's 25th anniversary in December, 2012. During that event, Khaled Mashaal, Hamas' Politburo Chief, declared: "We will never recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation; therefore there is no legitimacy for Israel, no matter how long it will take. Jihad and armed resistance is the only true path to liberation...We will free Jerusalem inch by inch, stone by stone...The right of return is sacred to us and we will not forfeit it."

Until Hamas proves that it is truly committed to the stated conditions of the Mideast Quartet's (composed of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations) 2007 "roadmap" — renouncing violence, recognizing Israel, and accepting previous agreements — Hamas' involvement undermines the Palestinian Authority's claimed commitment to be a partner in the peace process.

ISRAELI MIAs AND POWs

While Gilad Shalit is slowly recovering from his imprisonment, other Israeli soldiers remain missing, with no information as to their whereabouts: Zachary Baumel (a U.S. citizen); Yehudah Katz, and Zvi Feldman, who were captured in 1982 during the battle of Sultan Yaqub; Ron Arad, captured in 1986, and Guy Chaver, who disappeared in 1997. We painfully report that the body of Majdy Halabi, a Druze soldier who went missing in May of 2005, was recovered earlier this year. Regrettably, Hamas has been emboldened by the large number of prisoners freed by

Israel for the return of Gilad Shalit. Dozens of the prisoners Israel released returned to terrorist activity, and Hamas has vowed to abduct additional Israeli soldiers in the future. The Administration and Congress should continue the State Department mandate to raise the plight of these missing soldiers in all relevant Middle East discussions. More aggressive action needs to be taken to broadcast the message that these acts of brutality will not be tolerated.

ATTEMPTING TO DELEGITIMIZE ISRAEL

In recent years, a concerted, organized and well financed campaign to delegitimize Israel has intensified. A global network of organizations has emerged to urge the use of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) as a tactic to isolate the State of Israel. The BDS movement goes well beyond criticism of Israel's policies; it seeks to distort the history and national aspirations of the Jewish people and their continuous connection with their homeland for more than three millennia. Rather than seeking a two-state solution — with Israel and Palestine living peacefully side by side — BDS proponents advocate a one-state solution with Israel, as an independent state, ceasing to exist. For these reasons, the BDS movement must be treated as an existential danger to Israel and destructive to the peace process. The Jewish community urges that elected officials join us in our efforts to counter the BDS tactics.

BDS proponents advocate a one-state solution, with Israel ceasing to exist.

Over the past year, the BDS movement attempted to gain ground in New York. In March 2012, the BDS movement suffered an overwhelming defeat when it attempted to ban Israeli products from the Park Slope Food Coop. We would like to express our gratitude to the grassroots efforts of local Brooklyn rabbis and community leaders, as well as the Anti-Defamation League, the Israel Action Network, J Street, Americans for Peace Now, the New Israel Fund and StandWithUs, who worked in partnership with JCRC-NY and the UJA-Federation to defeat this effort. We are also thankful to our elected officials who took public positions opposing the boycott.

Additionally, the Russell Tribunal, a mock tribunal that attempts to delegitimize Israel, held proceedings in New York. Both events were widely dismissed by the New

York community, reflecting the fringe status of the BDS movement.

UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION

Another method of delegitimizing Israel is through the perversion of the principle of Universal Jurisdiction — a principle in international law whereby any nation may claim criminal jurisdiction over persons committing specific crimes of the most heinous variety (e.g. genocide). The trial of Adolph Eichman and Charles Taylor are two prominent and appropriate applications of this principle. Limiting arrests under this principle in 2002, the International Court of Justice decided that when abroad, state officials enjoy full immunity from arrest in another state on criminal charges, including charges of war crimes or crimes against humanity. This decision holds true, even when such officials may be subject to criminal proceedings before certain international criminal courts with jurisdiction.

Over the past decade, several countries have misused this legal procedure to issue warrants for the arrest of some Israeli political and military officials including Avi Dichter, former Minister of Public Security and former head of the Shin Bet (internal security agency), retired Israeli General Doron Almog, ex-Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and M.K. Tzipi Livni.

The very fact that many important figures in Israel's political leadership find themselves the victims of this misapplied principle — while so many others egregiously guilty of crimes against humanity travel the world with impunity — clearly demonstrates a double standard. More must be done to prevent Universal Jurisdiction from becoming yet another tool of Israel-bashers abroad.

THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

Initially, many looked at the developments known as the “Arab Spring” with cautious optimism. The reality of the developments of the past two years has tempered such leanings. It is difficult to identify any Arab country moving closer to true democracy.

Even as President Bashar Assad brutally suppresses the opposition, the outcome in Syria remains unclear (as does the future of its chemical weapons). Egypt faces mounting pressures that reach beyond ongoing political and economic crises. The Parliamentary majority's recent move to consolidate executive powers within a constitution led to the opposition's return to Tahrir

Square in protest and subsequent violence. No one can easily predict Egypt's direction.

Realistically, the new Middle East is a region where America's interests outdistance its influence. We appreciate President Morsi's stated desire to uphold the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt and note that he played a positive role during Former Secretary of State Clinton's successful brokering of a ceasefire with Hamas. At the same time, we are concerned that President Morsi hosted Iran's President Ahmadinejad and we agree with the Administration that his 2010 anti-Semitic remarks about Israel were “deeply offensive” and that he should explicitly repudiate them. The peace agreement between Israel and Egypt has long been a source of stability in the region, and we hope that it will continue to be in the future.

Elsewhere in the region, Islamist terrorists are ascending in Africa as are anti-democratic forces in many other countries. For the most part, the founders of the Arab Spring were citizens who rejected both violent religious extremism and secular dictators who sought to repress not just the extremists, but the rest of the population. Recent demonstrations in Tahrir Square prove that these citizens and their dreams have not gone away. They are still fighting for greater freedom and while they have suffered setbacks, they could well represent a critical mass of people across the Middle East and in other Muslim-majority areas.

No one expects the potentially emergent democracies to be created in the West's image. Rather, there will be indigenous approaches to governance, reflecting newly-created relationships between those who govern and the governed. We hope that newly established governments will uphold current peace agreements and protect universal human rights. To be successful, the systems of governance must hold fast to democratic norms and rules.

UNITY OF JERUSALEM

Under Israeli sovereignty, Jerusalem is open to followers of all faiths, with access to all holy places. Jerusalem is the eternal, undivided capital of Israel, having been the historical and spiritual center of the Jewish people for more than 3,000 years. JCRC-NY thanks Congress for its efforts to ensure that Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, remains united as the capital of the Jewish State. JCRC-NY reaffirms its endorsement of the *Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act of 1995*.

GLOBAL JEWRY & THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY



The American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) responded to Japanese tsunami survivors with its renowned post-trauma program that uses a huggable plush dog named “Hibuki.” The method helps Japanese children overcome post-traumatic stress. Hibuki and other treatments were pioneered by JDC in Israel.

DISASTER AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The sage Hillel asked, “But if I am only for myself, who am I?” We proudly recognize the extraordinary responses of the Israeli government and American Jewish organizations to disasters around the world.

Over the past year, MASHAV, the humanitarian assistance arm of Israel’s Foreign Ministry, responded to a diverse range of needs throughout the world: MASHAV helped secure food supply and increased crop production in Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda; assisted in educational facilities and hospitals in France, Brazil, India and Thailand; and saved the eyesight of 2,000 people throughout Nepal, Myanmar, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Cambodia, the Maldives, Ethiopia, and Cameroon where eye surgery is not readily available. MASHAV is currently in discussion with Germany to improve the value of fish farming in Kenya.

For nearly 100 years, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has saved lives and rebuilt communities in the wake of natural disasters, war, and other crises worldwide. Deploying its team of experts and in partnership with local and international NGOs, JDC’s robust disaster relief program includes the provision of food, clothing, fresh water, medicine, and temporary housing; post-trauma care; rebuilding schools and hospitals; and job-training, among other long-term

development projects. In 2012 alone, JDC continued its efforts in Haiti by opening a new, state-of-the-art, handicapped accessible school campus in Zoranje and in Japan operated community cafes providing psycho-social care, hand-craft and art therapy, legal aid, counseling, health services, community workshops and conflict-mediation for tsunami survivors.

JDC chairs the Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief, bringing together over 45 U.S. and foreign Jewish agencies representing the full spectrum of Jewish life, to respond to humanitarian disasters. JDC coordinates all of its efforts with the Jewish Federations of North America, local Jewish communities overseas, the U.S. Department of State, USAID, Interaction, the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israeli relief agencies, and the United Nations.

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is an international development and human rights organization inspired by Judaism’s commitment to justice. It provides long term grants to help 420 grassroots organizations in 35 countries empower women, promote economic justice and build civil society, and it offers service and service learning opportunities to volunteers from the American Jewish community every year. In 2012, AJWS continued its community rebuilding efforts in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand following the 2004 tsunami in addition to advocating for women’s rights in Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Senegal.

RIGHTS OF JEWISH REFUGEES FROM ARAB COUNTRIES

Since 1948, more than 850,000 Arab Jews were uprooted from Arab countries. Most immigrated to Israel, where they now comprise over half the population. Nearly all were forced to leave their possessions behind as they fled because governments generally confiscated their property. Yet, the international community has historically and disproportionately focused on Palestinian refugees, denying justice to displaced Jews who suffered mass violation of human rights in Arab lands since the founding of Israel.

JCRC-NY applauds the 2008 adoption of a House resolution recognizing the plight and flight of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries. It recognizes and defends the rights of Jewish and other refugees alongside those of Palestinian refugees. No peace can be reached in the Middle East without a parallel recognition and redress of the uprooting of centuries-old Jewish communities in Arab lands.

RELATIONS WITH THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

This year, we are especially concerned that Russia has seen fit to work counter to the interests of the international community in its dealings with Iran and Syria. Congress and the Administration should continue to try to gain Russia's support for the initiatives of the United States and the European Union in the Middle East.

The United States should pursue policies towards the region based on principles that:

- promote a constructive, positive, institutionally robust, long-term relationship with the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU), despite leadership changes and the persistence of contentious or outstanding issues;
- persuade FSU countries, which include moderate Muslim governments that have full diplomatic relations with Israel, to oppose biased anti-Israel UN resolutions and efforts to delegitimize Israel and encourage FSU countries to develop new strategies to support human rights and oppose anti-Semitism and xenophobia;
- enforce existing laws targeting violent extremists;
- expand local law enforcement training and grassroots civil society development;
- improve local health care;
- increase restitution of Jewish communal property; and
- create cultural and educational opportunities for Jewish and other minorities.

We are gravely concerned about the rise of popular anti-Semitism in the region. Two alarming examples: the support for the Ukraine's anti-Semitic *Svoboda* party — which received over 10% of the popular vote in December — and the ongoing recognition of former Waffen SS soldiers as heroes in the Baltic States. *In cooperation with the NCSJ — Advocates on behalf of Jews in the FSU.*

PROTECTING THE RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF MINORITY POPULATIONS

In his 1790 letter to the Touro Synagogue, George Washington set the bar for religious freedom in our country, writing: “the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.” However, in many countries the rights of religious minorities are compromised or denied.

According to a Pew Research study released in August, 2012, 75% of the world's population — over 5 billion

human beings — live in countries with very high restrictions on religion. These restrictions can range from onerous rules and regulations to imprisonment, torture, and even murder.

In Nigeria on Christmas Eve, 12 Christians were killed by an anti-West al-Qaeda affiliate, Boko Haram. The terrorist group coordinated several attacks on Christians and churches killing 19 people in the days following Christmas. This past August, in response to a meeting meant to encourage democracy, two monks were beaten in Vietnam. In September, a Pentecostal church in Russia was demolished by a group of men supported by local police. Additional concern over severe restriction of religious freedom is growing across the Middle East as well as China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Violations of religious freedom are not limited to violence and extremist acts, but also include active governmental repression, discrimination, the failure to take steps to curb intolerance, attacks, or harassment or attempts to control religious thought. The increasingly frequent efforts to restrict religious garb, including Muslim attire, are disturbing.

We join the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its concern that some newly drafted constitutions criminalize blasphemy and restrict religious freedom. By stifling the peaceful and constructive exchange of ideas, blasphemy laws underscore the intimate link between freedom of religion and freedom of expression. By punishing the expression of unpopular beliefs and opinions, blasphemy provisions not only violate both of these freedoms, but exacerbate intolerance and abet extremism and violence.

RITUAL SLAUGHTER AND CIRCUMCISION BANS

Two enduring religious practices — ritual slaughter and male circumcision — have special religious and cultural significance to the Jewish and Muslim communities. Attacks on both of these rites continue. Polish courts recently ruled ritual slaughter illegal, while movements to ban circumcision are on the rise in Scandinavia, Denmark and Finland. In May, a regional court in Germany ruled circumcision illegal. We praise the German government's response to negate that ruling by reestablishing a law to protect freedom of religion. Furthermore, we encourage other governments and judiciaries to continue to protect the sacredness of such traditions.

JEWISH CEMETERIES ABROAD

Cemeteries are traditionally maintained in perpetuity. Jewish history, religion and culture mandate the protection of Jewish cemeteries against desecration.

GLOBAL JEWRY & THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

In many places, this is not the case. In particular, vandalizing persists in Hungary, the Czech Republic, France and Serbia. Construction crews in these countries have unearthed tombstones and human skeletal remains from time-honored Jewish cemeteries. In January, the Federation of Serbian Jewish Communities protested the “catastrophic” conditions of the historic Jewish cemetery in the city of Nis and urged authorities to act against vandalism there.

We welcome efforts to identify, protect and memorialize the mass graves of Holocaust victims. JCRC-NY supports efforts to protect all these sacred sites from development or any other activity or use which desecrates them. *In cooperation with Asra Kadisha and American Jewish Committee.*

FREE ALAN GROSS

Alan P. Gross, a 62 year old international development specialist from Washington DC, was sentenced to 15 years in a Cuban maximum-security facility for carrying out “acts to undermine the integrity and independence” of Cuba. Gross was working for USAID when he was arrested in 2009 after establishing an intranet and improving access to the internet for the peaceful, non-dissident Jewish community. His appeal was denied. We regret that President Raul Castro decided not to include Gross on a list of 2,900 prisoners pardoned in December 2011.

Several members of Congress have spoken on the House floor in support of the immediate release of Gross on humanitarian grounds. Even though Gross may be improving, he lost nearly 100 pounds and suffers from a number of serious health issues.

JCRC-NY joined dozens of other organizations and co-sponsored a petition to release Gross. The American Jewish community applauds all efforts to release this innocent man and encourages the Administration to continue placing pressure on the Cuban Government to release Alan Gross.

ANTI-SEMITISM

The shootings of three children and a teacher at a Jewish school in Toulouse, France bring home the message that anti-Semitism continues to be alive and well, and evolving into new, contemporary forms of religious hatred, racism, and political, social and cultural

bigotry. A March, 2012 survey by the ADL showed that “anti-Semitism remains at high levels across the continent and infects many Europeans at a much higher level than we see here in the United States. In Hungary, Spain and Poland the numbers for anti-Semitic attitudes are literally off-the-charts and demand a serious response from political, civic and religious leaders.”

Within the discourse on the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is an increasing tendency to blur the lines between legitimate criticism of the State of Israel and anti-Semitism. While we recognize that Israel's policies are certainly open to criticism and opposition, it is anti-Semitic: to demonize Israel or to hold it responsible for all the tensions in the world; when Israel is held to different standards than any other country; or when Israel is denied the right to exist as a Jewish state. This is a threat that the Jewish community takes most seriously.

Current expressions of anti-Semitism include the defacing of property, desecration of cemeteries, and even accusations of blood libel and conspiracy of global domination. Anti-Semites increasingly use the internet as their preferred forum with an international reach. Holocaust denial is rampant. Their vicious messages can go viral using multiple social messaging outlets.

The 2011 FBI *Hate Crime Statistics* data show that 63% of religiously motivated hate crimes nationwide took place due to anti-Jewish sentiment. While these numbers have decreased since the 2010 report (65%) the fact that the overwhelming majority of hate crimes is carried out against members of the Jewish faith is quite disturbing.

Over the years, we have learned that official governmental voices and community leaders — speaking with moral clarity — can counteract the stridency of the haters. Hate crimes must be expeditiously and thoroughly investigated and those responsible must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Today's anti-Semitism is not new. It continues, embodying both new levels and new types of cooperation between the racist right, radical left and Jihadist Muslims. Regretfully, seven decades after the Holocaust, society's response must also continue. We are grateful that Congress' enactment of the *Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990* and the *Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004* direct the Administration to collect relevant data so that appropriate responses may be developed.



When Hurricane Sandy struck the New York area, the hurricane response by UJA-Federation of NY and its agencies was swift and bold: making \$10 million available to agencies, synagogues, and day schools and mobilizing thousands of volunteers to help in storm response efforts.

RESPONDING TO SUPERSTORM SANDY

On October 29th, Superstorm Sandy hit the New York region, causing unprecedented devastation that ravaged our area — taking lives, destroying property, and challenging our community’s resilience as never before.

Despite frustrating delays, we are grateful to Congress for the passage of the *Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, 2013*. It is merely a start in what will be a long road to recovery.

The superstorm disproportionately affected the most vulnerable of the eight-county New York region and the vulnerable of the Jewish community were no exception. Living in or near areas hardest hit by the superstorm are: 30% of all Jewish households with seniors, 43% of all Jewish households with Russian-speakers, and 31% of all poor Jewish households.

Their road to recovery will be especially arduous and require support from the Jewish community’s extensive network of service providers, who can quickly mobilize,

coordinate, and deliver funds, personnel, and counseling to alleviate suffering in the areas affected by disasters. In the New York region, Sandy triggered a housing crisis and trauma and mental health needs are just beginning. Thousands will need legal assistance to help them sort through the maze of insurance and governmental programs.

Nonprofits, including houses of worship, play a critical role in our region and they were particularly hard hit. In an average disaster, FEMA provides assistance to 22 nonprofit organizations. Sandy was anything but average, and over 900 nonprofits have applied to FEMA. Dozens of synagogues and Jewish parochial schools hope to rely on FEMA for help. We urge the members of Congress to work to ensure that FEMA responds appropriately to this communal infrastructure crisis.

The members of the New York Congressional delegation are true heroes, standing together in solidarity in a bipartisan fashion. New Yorkers, a naturally resilient group, will need that to continue as we recover.

DOMESTIC

HOMELAND SECURITY

New York City continues to be in the terrorist's crosshairs. Symbolic or iconic targets like Times Square and the subways seem to be the targets of choice, and the disruption of our economy remains a top goal. Iran and those inspired by al-Qaeda (both abroad and homegrown) are increasingly dangerous. New York has been the target of 18 plots or attacks since 1992, and eight of those incidents involved Jews or Jewish institutions. Clearly, the Jewish community has a stake in the continued effectiveness of the NYPD and other law enforcement agencies.

The mass shootings in Newtown, Oak Creek and Aurora remind us of the relative vulnerability of "soft targets" and the absolute necessity of security, awareness, planning and preparedness. We support efforts to make such resources available to all school children: public, private and parochial schools.

NONPROFIT HOMELAND SECURITY GRANTS

Based on a competitive process, 31% of the grants are given to New York nonprofits, reflecting the Department of Homeland Security's assessment of New York's risk. Unfortunately, funding constraints limited the number of New York grantees to 43. Dozens of organizations continue to contact the JCRC-NY asking if they can apply for the next round of grants. With the increasing risks, we urge Congress to specifically include funding for this important program in the upcoming budget.

Another important component of community security is the integration of nonprofits into the nation's overall homeland security response, including the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Activities program, and enhancement of cyber-security.

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

Jewish teachings mandate that the stranger be welcomed and treated with respect. The Jewish community has long supported a fair and generous immigration policy consistent with our American and Jewish values. By welcoming immigrants, we stoke the engine of New York's growth and remain true to our core values of pluralism, freedom and opportunity.

JCRC-NY and UJA-Federation of NY are committed to an immigration policy based on humanitarian rescue, family reunification and strengthening the U.S. economy. While remaining true to those general principles, America

must ensure the security of our nation's borders in this age of terrorism and effectively preserve the basic civil liberties and due process embodied in our Constitution.

It is our fervent hope that this is the year for comprehensive reform. Our leaders should ensure that policies are: humane, realistic and practical; address economic and security concerns; and provide a timely, clear pathway for the undocumented, as appropriate, to participate in our society and to eventually obtain full citizenship.

REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE

The images of the aftermath of the horrific events in Newtown are indelibly etched in our minds. Despite the visionary leadership of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the historic agreement between Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature that led to the passage of the groundbreaking NY SAFE Act, New York cannot reduce gun violence alone. It requires concerted national efforts.

If enacted, the Administration's plan that includes closing background check loopholes to keep guns out of dangerous hands; banning military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and taking other common-sense steps to reduce gun violence; making schools safer; and increasing access to mental health services will save lives.

We agree with President Obama that, "We won't be able to stop every violent act, but if there is even one thing that we can do to prevent any of these events, we have a deep obligation, all of us, to try."

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

For many reasons — economic, foreign policy and climatic — our nation must focus on reformulating its energy policies. We applaud efforts of the Administration dedicated to fostering an economically and environmentally sustainable energy future for our country. A combination of sound public policy and the innovative capacity of the market is needed to push our economy, and the world's, towards low carbon energy alternatives. Robust public-private collaboration will prove crucial to finding solutions to the threat posed by a rapidly changing climate.

Renewable and alternative energy technologies are fundamental elements in the efforts to increase

America's energy security and address the long-term challenge of global climate change. Some of the most interesting energy-related innovations capitalize on Israel's leadership in developing renewable and alternative energy sources. Joint cooperative ventures between American and Israeli businesses should be encouraged. JCRC-NY supports policies that encourage sustainability, greenhouse emission reduction, the effective management of the strategic petroleum reserve, energy diversification and alternative fuel sources.

JUSTICE FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

In recent years, some progress has been made regarding the restitution of, or compensation for, formerly Jewish-owned property which was confiscated during the Holocaust and/or subsequently nationalized by communist regimes. For example, the Government of Hungary committed \$21 million, over a five-year period, for Holocaust survivors in need worldwide. The fund, which represents a down payment on the value of Jewish heirless property in Hungary, is being used to provide various types of emergency assistance to Hungarian victims of Nazi persecution. The Conference on Jewish Material Claims in Germany ("Claims Conference") administers that part of the fund which has been allocated for Holocaust survivors of Hungarian origin living outside of Hungary. In addition, the Lithuanian government, after nine difficult years of negotiations with the World Jewish Restitution Organization ("WJRO"), enacted legislation which provides approximately \$1.1 million that will be distributed as symbolic payments to Lithuanian Jewish Holocaust victims worldwide. The legislation also provides that about \$53 million will be paid over a 10 year period to a Lithuanian foundation — comprised of representatives from the local Jewish community and the WJRO — for property seized during the Holocaust for various Holocaust-related, survivor and Jewish enhancement projects.

Recently, negotiations with the Government of Germany resulted in increased benefits to additional survivors, including: those who were in a ghetto for three to 11 months (lowered from 18 months) regardless of their current age; and those who lived in hiding or under false identity in Nazi-occupied areas. The German government will also provide over \$550 million in funding for the homecare needs of needy Holocaust survivors worldwide.

The Claims Conference, along with the other leading advocates for Holocaust survivors oppose proposed

legislation to permit lawsuits against European insurance companies for Holocaust-era insurance policies, including those that have reached agreements and settlements over unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims. If enacted the legislation might jeopardize ongoing negotiations for survivor benefits while raising false expectations.

The legislation would violate commitments made by the United States to European governments and participating insurance companies, which resulted in research and payments on pre-World War II insurance policies owned by Holocaust victims and their heirs. More than \$300 million in payments were made through this process to nearly 50,000 claimants who had never received payments on their families' insurance policies.

Recent negotiations brought increased benefits to additional survivors and a down payment on Jewish heirless property located in other countries.

Claims Conference Chair Julius Berman observed, "Contrary to the intentions of its sponsors in Congress, such legislation will not help Holocaust survivors but may actually jeopardize ongoing negotiations for payments and assistance to them." The negotiations with Germany and others "are predicated on prior, good-faith agreements. For the sake of survivors everywhere who will increasingly need this assistance, we cannot jeopardize future negotiations with this legislation. The legislation's results are dubious at best, but through negotiations we have obtained substantial, real funding and payments for Holocaust victims," said Mr. Berman.

These views have also been shared by the Obama, Bush and Clinton Administrations, which have consistently opposed similar versions of this legislation offered in previous sessions of Congress. We understand the frustration of many survivors who have been denied justice for so many years and the motivations of the sponsors who wish to right a historic wrong. However, this legislation is likely to lead to lengthy and costly litigation rather than achieving an additional measure of justice. *In cooperation with the Joint Distribution Committee and the Conference of Material Claims against Germany.*



Programs providing services and care for our seniors remain a high priority for UJA-Federation and its agencies.

RESPONDING TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The debt crisis and state of economic turmoil roiling our nation necessitate shared sacrifice from all levels of society. Our deficit reduction plans must be crafted carefully, so that the most vulnerable Americans remain protected and poverty levels are not increased.

Both the Jewish social service system and the broader nonprofit sector continue to be confronted by a dramatic expansion in the profound need for social services from those who have lost their jobs, homes, health care and food security over the past few years. This great surge in need for safety net services has coincided with a significant reduction in government and philanthropic funding streams.

Our social service network has been stretched thin by the influx of needy families and individuals in economic crises, a situation confronted by faith, charitable and public institutions across the country. Hurricane Sandy has recently exacerbated the help needed by many

New Yorkers. We intend to continue to work with our coalitional partners in the Jewish community and beyond to advocate for the most prudent cuts possible, while maintaining the service programs integral to the vulnerable populations we serve.

PROTECTING MEDICAID AND THE HEALTH CARE SAFETY NET

Congress and the Administration must improve the quality and delivery of Medicaid and Medicare, while ensuring these programs remain fiscally and programmatically sound. The current economic climate and demographic changes demand that our government and health care institutions redesign our health care system; however greater efficiencies must not be achieved at the expense of our health care safety net.

Fully half the funding supporting UJA-Federation's human service network is derived from Medicaid funds; as a consequence the health and vigor of our

agencies' programming depend significantly upon the program.

It is critical that Medicaid and Medicare reflect greater innovation in health delivery methods. We support the programs' rebalancing to promote more home and community-based services and hail important initiatives such as managed care for special populations that offer better care coordination while reducing the cost of services. We believe the President and Congress can maintain Medicaid and Medicare as entitlement programs within the framework of existing resources.

ALLEVIATING POVERTY

We believe it is critical that our nation continue to serve the poor and near poor during these difficult times. Far too many Americans cannot subsist without the government's safety net. UJA-Federation continues our work with all levels of government to ensure that New York's social service network has the resources necessary to meet the needs of the most vulnerable at times of economic hardship.

Community services must be sustained to provide safety net assistance. Adequate funding is vital for programs such as the Community Development Block Grant, the Community Services Block Grant and the Social Services Block Grant in order to meet these challenges.

Each of these block grant programs has been subject to dramatic funding cuts for more than a decade. Such reductions in financial resources have eroded significantly the ability of UJA-Federation agencies and other nonprofits to appropriately serve individuals and families seeking their assistance.

EMERGENCY FOOD AND SHELTER PROGRAM

Over the past four years, our nation has experienced a growth rate of more than 35% in the number of children who are living in homeless shelters, motels, on the street, or with other families. In the United States today, one in 45 children is homeless. Across the country, food pantries are continuing to see unprecedented demand for help from individuals and families.

Child poverty is estimated to cost the United States over \$500 billion each year, as homeless and hungry kids are more prone to have health problems, to be

less likely to succeed in school and work, and more likely to end up in the criminal justice system.

Since its inception in 1983, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) has been a major unemployment and poverty safety-net for millions of Americans at risk of food insecurity and homelessness as they become economically vulnerable. EFSP supplements the supports and services provided by nearly 13,000 public and nonprofit agencies across the country.

In FY2009 and FY2010, Congress increased the EFSP annual allocation to \$200 million in step with the economic downturn. However, in FY2011, Congress abruptly reversed course and cut the EFSP allocation by an unprecedented 40% (\$80 million) despite the recession's prolonged effects. That cut was felt across the nation as local EFSP boards struggled to make decisions about how to absorb the cuts across the public and nonprofit recipient agencies that were struggling to meet extensive needs. In fiscal year 2012 the program was appropriated \$120 million, extending a cut of more than 40% from FY 2010.

We are asking the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security to fund EFSP at \$200 million in FY 2013 in an effort to restore funding back to FY 2010 levels.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) is the nation's most important anti-hunger program. Last year, in a typical month, it helped almost 45 million low-income Americans to afford a nutritionally adequate diet.

Nearly 75% of SNAP participants are in families with children; more than one-quarter of participants are in households with seniors or people with disabilities. After unemployment insurance, SNAP is the most responsive federal program providing additional assistance during economic downturns, and its benefits are among the most effective forms of economic stimulus. Moody's Analytics estimates that in a weak economy, every \$1 increase in SNAP benefits generates \$1.71 in economic activity.

SNAP's success as a child nutrition program is even more impressive. The program has a tremendous impact on children's health. Currently, SNAP benefits help the

HUMAN SERVICES

families of close to one in three children nationwide put food on the table.

Moreover, SNAP is an effective antipoverty program for children: SNAP benefits kept about 2 million children out of poverty, and 1.3 million out of deep poverty (or above 50 percent of the poverty line), in 2010. Even more striking, SNAP cut the number of children in extreme poverty (households earning less than \$2 per person per day) in 2011 by half — from 2.8 million to 1.4 million.

We anticipate that SNAP benefits will continue to be on the cutting block this year as the Reauthorization of the Farm Bill is negotiated. Cutting SNAP benefits as a means to achieve deficit reduction will have perilous consequences. It would jeopardize low-income Americans' ability to obtain a basic diet, and it would have devastating health and financial effects on substantial numbers of our most vulnerable.

MAXIMIZING INCENTIVES FOR CHARITABLE GIVING AND NONPROFIT INTERESTS

UJA-Federation believes that tax policy should encourage charitable giving, especially during times of economic distress. As demands on nonprofits continue to grow, we must ensure that the tax code continues to promote giving and enables charities to meet the rising demand for critical community-based services.

We urge Congress to adopt charitable tax incentives that maximize philanthropic giving and believe expenditures in this arena are one more step that will help grow the American economy.

The ability of donors to deduct contributions to charity from their taxes is a cornerstone of America's charitable tradition, and an indispensable source of funding for social service agencies that provide vital alternatives to direct government programs. In addition to providing for those in need, nonprofits create jobs and leverage economic activity. Nonprofits account for 5% of GDP, 9% of the economy's wages and nearly 10% of the

nation's jobs. Barriers that limit charitable giving only hinder this critical nonprofit sector.

We urge Congress to adopt charitable tax incentives that maximize philanthropic giving and believe expenditures in this arena are one more step that will help grow the American economy. We favor making permanent the current IRA charitable rollover; allowing unlimited gifts to qualified charities including donor advised funds; increasing or eliminating the adjusted gross income limitation on gifts to qualified charities; extending the carryover period for charitable deductions; and providing an above-the-line deduction for charitable gifts for individuals who do not itemize. We oppose capping charitable deductions on income.

We endorse efforts to support the interests and mission of nonprofits and are opposed to restrictions on the definition of what constitutes a charity, burdensome new tax requirements, and impediments to nonprofit governance, operations and fundraising.

AGING AND LONG TERM CARE

The rapidly growing older adult population is best served by aging policies that align with the trends toward aging in place. We strongly support the development and appropriate funding of programs that promote community based health and human services that assist older Americans to maintain their independence and quality of life as they age.

UJA-Federation supports programs and policies that are effective in permitting older adults to improve their quality of life and preserve their dignity, such as the reauthorization of the *Older Americans Act* and the vital programs it funds, the Community Innovation for Aging in Place program, and enhanced access to quality transportation and affordable housing.

TRANSPORTATION FOR SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

UJA-Federation strongly supports *The Senior Transportation and Mobility Improvement Act* legislation that would improve transportation options for seniors and persons with disabilities. The bill has a number of important provisions which would help bring about a much better transportation system for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Transportation provides the basis of a multitude of services that are available to seniors aging in place; without it, seniors cannot get to doctor's appointments, social programming and other essential services and activities. It is estimated that there currently exists \$1 billion per year in unmet transportation needs for older adults.

By the year 2015, more than 15.5 million Americans 65 and older will live in communities where public transportation service is poor or non-existent. This dearth in services will become increasingly significant as the ranks of the elderly grow. By 2030, it is projected that 8.7 million Americans will be age 85 and over, and a substantial portion of them will no longer drive.

NEED FOR ELDER JUSTICE

Millions of seniors are harmed and impoverished by elder abuse in the United States. Elder abuse is estimated to have an annual cost in the tens of billions of dollars, often unnecessarily borne by Medicaid and Medicare due to preventable injury and illness.

The NYS Office of Children and Family Services released an elder abuse prevalence study last year which revealed that in New York State there are approximately 270,000 older adults who reported having been victims of abuse — but that the actual prevalence rate is nearly 24 times greater than the number of referred cases.

The plight of these victims has not been a priority on the national or state agendas. The passage of the *Elder Justice Act* three years ago was an important recognition of the need for a coordinated federal response to elder abuse — however, no funds have yet been appropriated for any part of the Act. In addition, elder justice provisions of the *Older American Act* have not been funded or implemented. We urge our members of Congress to work towards strengthening this funding stream to reflect the severity of the issue.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Our frail elderly population is in particularly great need of housing assistance. The Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program provides direct loans to nonprofits for the development of critically needed supportive housing for the elderly and has been clearly recognized as one of our government's most

successful housing programs. Its funding and viability must be preserved.

The Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities program provides funding to nonprofits to develop rental housing with the availability of supportive services for very low-income adults with disabilities and provides rent subsidies for the projects. Until the recent reforms, the law was outdated in terms of disability housing policy, and appropriations had declined from more than \$350 million in the mid-1990s to recent levels of approximately \$240 million.

Adequate funding for these programs will ensure that new housing serve as a platform to access key services required to age in place and for persons with disabilities to live independently in mainstream, integrated settings.

We are also greatly concerned that despite the burgeoning need for Section 8 housing vouchers, only one quarter of eligible households receive Section 8 due to funding constraints. Congress must support efforts to devise a rational plan to implement regulatory and legislative changes in the Section 8 program that restores the program's credibility and stability with the intent of paving the way for future growth.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs need to be revitalized to permit our institutions of higher education and workforce system to better prepare for the challenges of this economic climate. In recent years, WIA programs have been the target of declining resources and a lack of coherent strategy which has resulted in a workforce system that is woefully underfunded and ill prepared for the challenges of our global economy. Education is the ultimate form of economic development — funding must be allocated to develop and sustain a skilled workforce. UJA-Federation is particularly concerned about mature workers and the difficulty they have finding gainful employment.

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND/OR MENTAL ILLNESS

UJA-Federation supports full funding of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, affordable and accessible

HUMAN SERVICES

supportive housing units and other home and community based services, respite care and job training for individuals with disabilities.

FULLY FUND COMBATING AUTISM ACT PROGRAMS

Autism is considered the fastest growing developmental disorder in the United States, occurring in as many as one in every 88 births, and one out of 54 boys. However, despite the increasingly high prevalence of this disorder, autism research remains one of the lowest funded areas of medical research in both the public and private sector.

While significant progress has been made in recent years to increase the funding for autism research at the federal level, much more must be done to confront the challenges endured by an overwhelming number of American families. Experts agree that early intervention is important in addressing the symptoms associated with autism and can have dramatic effects in improving individual outcomes.

Congress recognized autism as a national public health priority with the enactment of the *Combating Autism Act in 2006*, legislation that enabled the autism community to make tremendous research strides. Last year, the 2011 Combating Autism Reauthorization Act was introduced and it would significantly increase both the depth and breadth of the federal response to autism spectrum disorders. However, to realize the benefits of this program, we must appropriately fund its activities, including critical programs at the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the Health Resources and Services Administration and other federal agencies.

HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Health information technology is a critical component of health reform. New York State has been a leader in the movement to create an electronic system enabling providers to adopt and utilize electronic health records. We believe that widespread use of electronic systems is an important way in which government resources can be more efficiently utilized, saving the Medicaid and Medicare programs millions of dollars annually.

UJA-Federation of New York and our agencies have been strong partners in these state efforts to use information technology to improve health care delivery

and outcomes. Prudent adoption of Health Information Technology — using electronic health records to record and track health care data and services provided to a consenting patient, and efficiently share the data with other medical providers serving that same patient through health information exchanges will increase healthcare quality. It will reduce medical errors and promote care and coordination, and will result in fewer duplicative tests and lower costs throughout the system.

The passage of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* provided \$20 billion in incentives and grants to health care providers and hospitals to establish interoperable electronic health record systems through the nation. These benefits are extended to most health professionals and to most hospitals. However, the mental health and community aging sectors of the health care community were ineligible for this critical funding.

UJA-Federation of New York and our agencies have been strong partners in these state efforts to use information technology to improve health care delivery and outcomes.

We are very supportive of legislation such as the *Behavioral Health Information Technology Act* which will be reintroduced in both houses of Congress this year that would extend the incentives for the “meaningful use” of electronic health records by ensuring the eligibility of most behavioral and mental health professionals and their facilities.

Delivering health technology to mental and behavioral providers bridges the care for patients with mental and physical illnesses. UJA-Federation believes that community based mental hygiene, home care and long term care programs must also be able to access these incentives. These programs have a specialized focus and serve patients and clients who are high-cost drivers in the system and who transition between various care settings as their needs change. We are concerned that these nascent efforts to develop health information technology systems and networks without including this population will result in a flawed network faced with lower health care outcomes and greater costs.

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