

NEWS



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Mayor John F. Street Announces Emergency Relief Effort for Hurricane Katrina Victims Philadelphia Will House Up To 1,000 Families Through "Project Brotherly Love"

PHILADELPHIA – The City of Philadelphia will respond to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina by mounting a massive relief effort that will provide housing and related services for up to 1,000 families left homeless by the hurricane in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast, Mayor John F. Street announced today.

The major relief effort, named "*Project Brotherly Love*," is intended to alleviate horrendous human suffering and avert some of the tragedies occurring daily in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coasts of Mississippi and Alabama. It will place Philadelphia among the forefront of American cities responding to this deepening disaster.

"I have watched these tragedies on the news for days," Mayor Street said at a news conference. "Hundreds of people have died. Many more are still missing. Tens of thousands of homes have been destroyed. The City of New Orleans is nearly entirely underwater. People are without food, without a decent place to live, without medicine. We cannot stand idly by and allow this suffering to continue. We have a moral responsibility to do something. I concluded it was time for action."

The Mayor has spoken with Federal officials, including HUD Secretary Alfonso Jackson, about Philadelphia's plans to house hurricane victims. City officials have communicated with Federal and Pennsylvania emergency management officials as well. The Mayor said the City would continue to cooperate with all relevant Federal and state authorities in responding to the growing national tragedy, but it was time for Philadelphia to take a more active role in bringing comfort and aid to Hurricane Katrina's many victims.

"We have to get as many of these people as possible out of the devastated area," Mayor Street said. "We need to treat them humanely, house them, treat their medical needs, clothe and feed them. We believe we can do better for them here than they can do for them there. It has become increasingly apparent that you can't take help to the people of this disaster – so we have decided to bring the people to the help."

City officials with expertise in preventing and treating homelessness; social services; public health; law enforcement and public safety; public schools; housing; recreation; and information systems met throughout the day and into the evening, developing plans to house up to 1,000 displaced families, which the Mayor said could

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mean up to 3,000 to 5,000 citizens ultimately coming to Philadelphia.

The Mayor indicated a mixture of public facilities, including school buildings no longer in active use, public housing, community hospitals and hotels no longer in service were being studied as potential sources of housing for the hurricane victims when they arrive.

Philadelphia has developed a nationally-recognized model in recent years for treating and preventing homelessness, and the Mayor said that nationally-regarded system would be deployed to screen and assess all incoming citizens in need of housing and other support services. One central intake location will most likely be utilized to make those initial screenings.

The City's faith-based community will play a pivotal role in Philadelphia's response to the housing crisis in the Gulf region. The Mayor met today with leaders of Philadelphia's clergy community, and church leaders are expected to play a prominent role in urging their congregations to open up their homes to help care for Katrina's victims as well.

Other private efforts to assist the City's hurricane relief plan are underway. WPVI-TV, Channel 6 Action News, announced plans to urge viewers to volunteer to host a hurricane-victim family when they arrive in Philadelphia from the Gulf.

Philadelphia School District CEO Paul Vallas attended the City's planning meetings throughout the day, and said the School District stood ready to provide emergency housing through unused school buildings, and to enter children of hurricane victims in Philadelphia public schools while they reside here.

Mayor Street said while Project Brotherly Love was a significant undertaking that would involve some expenditure of City funds, he was prepared to make that commitment and follow through.

"This could be the greatest natural disaster in our country's history," Mayor Street concluded. "We need a response commensurate with that. We have made a commitment and we mean it. Send those victims here now. This City – the City of Brotherly Love – will respond."

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