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**MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT**  
**For HR 592**  
**Equal Treatment of Houses of Worship**

Houses of worship for all faiths are a crucial part of the New York region's fabric and while they have always been beacons of support, comfort and community resources, since Hurricane Sandy New Yorkers have needed these institutions more than ever. These organizations are an essential part of neighborhoods and enable rites of passage, community gatherings, charitable activities and are sources of comfort and prayer. In the face of lost homes and distressed property, disruption of employment opportunities and dislocated families, houses of worship have helped many find stability and fulfillment in an uncertain time. In the aftermath of Sandy, as with so many other natural disasters, churches, synagogues and other houses of worship have been places offering essential response services to people in need – even while the church, mosque or synagogue itself is damaged.

Toward that end, UJA-Federation is proud to have funded close to \$1 million to 76 synagogues to help these institutions support their communities through respite and relief and enlisted dozens of volunteers to help rebuild damaged buildings. Our efforts have made a significant impact at synagogues including West End Temple in Belle Harbor, Queens, Congregation Khal Yeraim in Sea Gate, Brooklyn and The Jewish Russian Learning Center in Staten Island and these houses of worship have helped the Jewish and broader communities in the neighborhoods they are serving.

Each of these synagogues serves as vital hubs of community providing physical, spiritual and emotional shelter for community members. That said, during Hurricane Sandy, many of the synagogues suffered severe damage and lack the resources to rebuild. UJA-Federation while helping houses of worship serve individuals in need does not have the resources to support capital needs.

Many houses of worship function similar to other non-profits by providing day care programming, schooling for children and youth, senior centers and resource centers for immigrants. These services are the lifeblood for communities. Houses of worship have worked closely with elected officials and government on city, state and federal levels to coordinate disaster relief efforts to the benefit of the entire community.

The Stafford Act provides that private nonprofit entities – such as schools, hospitals and community centers – damaged in a natural disaster may receive financial grants from FEMA to repair their buildings. The Act does not list houses of worship among its list of examples of nonprofits so eligible; neither does the Act exclude houses of worship in any way. To the extent that FEMA has provided aid to eligible programs run by houses of worship, the aid has not been provided on the same terms as the aid provided to other eligible nonprofits. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate for FEMA's aid program for private nonprofits to assist houses of worship with their rebuilding needs.

Current Supreme Court jurisprudence makes clear that religious institutions may receive government financial aid in the context of a broad program administered on the basis of religion neutral criteria. This

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is why houses of worship and other religious nonprofits can, and do, currently receive grants from the Department of Homeland Security to improve their security and the Interior Department for historic preservation.

Numerous houses of worship have suffered financially from this crisis and federal funding would significantly alleviate the effects of building damage and their contents.

Accordingly, UJA-Federation supports passage of HR 592