

**Testimony of Emelda Paul  
President, Lafitte Resident Council  
Resident of Lafitte**

**Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Hearing  
“Two Years After the Storm: Housing Needs in the Gulf”  
Washington, DC**

**September 25, 2007**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Emelda Paul. I was a 30-year resident of Lafitte and I am the president of the Lafitte Residents Council. I am here because I want our people, our families to return home to New Orleans. I want to thank Congress for creating this legislation which will improve our housing and make our community better. We can't wait any longer. The longer the situation drags out, the harder it will be to get people to come home.

To make Lafitte a stronger community and better place to live I believe that there are several commitments that must be made:

- Every resident should be able to come home.
- Every unit that was taken down should be replaced with a unit that would be affordable to the residents.
- Counseling should be available to those who need it.
- And most importantly, redevelopment groups should work with the residents like Providence has with us from the very beginning.
- They have listened to our needs and asked questions like how many bedrooms do we need? What kind of assistance or help do we need - do we need child care, job counseling or supportive services?

When I see and hear some of these people who are fighting the redevelopment, I ask myself, “Who the heck are these people and where were they when we really needed them?” They're saying we should save the buildings. They're talking about bricks and mortar and we're talking about peoples' lives. We're the ones who have to live in there under these conditions. I can't say for sure how many, but I can say that there are a lot of people who think like me who want something better than what they have now.

I've been back to see Lafitte and from what I've seen I don't want to go back there anymore. I don't want to live like that anymore. I'm living in the new Fischer senior village in New Orleans now. It's nice, clean, and safe. When I go from my apartment at Fischer to see my old apartment at Lafitte it's depressing.

When you get up close to the buildings you see that the ground is sinking. I had mold in my bedroom way before Katrina and now I have mold growing up the walls on both sides. If people are going to come back, I want to see them coming back to something decent, something healthy, something safe. I took photos of the flooding and of what I saw from the window of my apartment after Katrina.

People are under a lot of stress and want to come home. They want to come home to a NEW Lafitte with new apartments and new homes. They want something better for their families. So why can't we allow those who want to come home to come now and also take down and rebuild part of the site in the meantime. While we're sitting here bickering about what should be done, the people are the ones who are suffering. Some of them are dying.

I think there are about 200-250 individuals and families who want to come back right now. And probably 100-200 would want to come back in a couple of years because they're happy with where they're living right now. They have a decent apartment, their kids are in school, they have jobs, and medical care where they are. We have to give them something to come back to that is better than before - something that includes an emphasis on the children like good schools, safe places to play, and medical care.

I like the idea of phasing and I know that more and more people are excited about it. People can come home in apartments temporarily and participate in the planning for the redevelopment. We want new larger apartments for our children and our grandchildren where people can move around.

People want to come home, but we can't have people living in the same conditions they were living in before Katrina. We need and want up to date kitchens and bathrooms. We're tired of the patch jobs on buildings from the 1940s. If we bring people back we want to make sure they have a safe environment. We want a New Jerusalem. The time is now. We've got to bring our residents home. And build something better here for our children and grandchildren.