

NY Pastors Rally Against Bloomberg Decision to Evict Churches

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg will face protesters on Thursday as he moves to evict houses of worship from public schools.

"Houses of worship throughout the city consider this policy to be nothing short of discrimination, and we will make that known on Thursday," says New York City Councilman Fernando Cabrera. "I applaud the New York City Housing Authority's efforts to work with religious groups that meet in their spaces, but the Department of Education needs to follow suit."

Cabrera explained that the city is in perilous economic times and that houses of worship provide social services that take the burden off the city and its taxpayers.

"Treating houses of worship equally with other community groups helps our communities," says Cabrera. "Evicting them hurts people and neighborhoods by denying them the social and spiritual services they desperately need, which in my district includes tutoring services, soup kitchens and more. Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Walcott need to listen to what the citizens of this city want."

The rally comes on the heels of the first big victory for equal access in New York City this year. On Friday, the New York City Housing Authority relented from its efforts to evict at least five churches meeting for worship services in the community centers of the city's public housing projects.

Pastor Joe Fletcher of Bronx Bible Church and Pastor Dimas Salaberrios of Infinity New York Church received calls from Housing Authority officials who told the pastors that the city

is willing to sign long-term agreements so the churches can continue conducting their services in the projects.

“Churches and other religious groups should be able to meet in public buildings on the same terms as other community groups,” says Jordan Lorence, senior counsel with the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF). “These churches offer the people in hurting communities hope and help for their daily needs. To drive out the churches based on a discredited, extreme notion of ‘separation of church and state’ benefits no one and harms people who need help most.”

In December, after the U.S. Supreme Court denied review in the *Bronx Household of Faith v. Board of Education of the City of New York* case, the Housing Authority sought to expand the ban on worship services from the city’s public schools to include the community centers at public housing developments. ADF attorneys explained the relevant constitutional law to the Housing Authority and warned of legal action if it did not allow the churches to keep meeting.

Councilman Fernando Cabrera has served the 14th Council District of the Bronx since January 2010. He has served as the senior pastor of New Life Outreach International since 1988.