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Feliz Navidad, Shalom, Salaam, Happy Holidays, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa!

I am honored to have this opportunity to send special greetings to the family of Friends House during this holiday season. A strong community is crucial to bringing us all joy, peace and continued success during particularly challenging times.

Friends House provides the love and support that we all need and thrive on as we grow and becomes compassionate members of our community. Permanent, affordable housing that provides a home, not just an apartment, is the building block of a sustainable community. I have long been a supporter of Friends House's mission and community-based work, and am thrilled that they are part of my district. They continue to shine as a glorious example of how people can live together with dignity, respect, and trust.

In the spirit of the holidays, I would like to share my own story of a Christmas memory from when I was a young child. When I was four years old growing up in Williamsburg, my father worked at a pharmacy in the neighborhood. I asked him, why Santa isn't coming to our house this year? My father told me that Santa Claus had been so busy this year that he had to drop off all the toys at the pharmacy where he worked. There was a fire in the store right before Christmas, and everything had burned, including all the toys that were stashed there. All the presents had been lost, and my father told me he was unable to reach Santa to see if he could "fly by again". I was confused and sad . . . I had been waiting for my O'Nuts game and of course, the Susie Baker oven! My father took me to different stores to buy last minute presents. I had been a good girl that year and was upset with Santa. My father did his best to help us get some last minute toys, but I remember it as the year without presents . . .as I wanted Santa Claus.

I look back at this memory now and appreciate its seriousness, but the lightness and joy with which my father was able to create a merry holiday for his family, even amidst the loss of the store. It is a clear reminder of what really matters during the holiday season and the beginning of a new year: a caring environment, dear friends, a close "community within a community", and the type of home that Friends House provides. Friends is neither a typical shelter nor a residence, "mi casa es tu casa", a home for all. Friends House is unique because it is created by and for people who have suffered from being homeless and becoming ill with HIV/AIDS.

I never cease to be impressed by the hard work and commitment of the dedicated staff, board members, community partners, donors and volunteers who all bring their passion and expertise to creating and maintaining this beautiful community. I support your heartfelt endeavors and send my sincerest holiday blessings to all. Without Friend's House, the holidays would not be the same for the countless men and women who rely on the warmth and empowering spirit that make up this special place.

My warmest wishes for a Happy Holiday!

Rosie

Rosie Mendez, City Councilwoman, District 2