

December 21, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

To Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), I write to express appreciation for the emergency relief bill introduced in the House of Representatives on December 19 and to urge you to take additional steps to ensure federal disaster relief resources reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes who are often the hardest hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover afterwards. By providing \$81 billion, including \$26 billion in Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds, the emergency relief bill is a significant improvement on the White House request, which would have been grossly inadequate to address the most pressing needs of communities devastated by the recent hurricanes and wildfires. DHRC commends your leadership, as well as that of Transportation and HUD Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) and Ranking Member David Price (D-NC), for your commitment to the recovery efforts. However, more needs to be done to help those with the lowest incomes who face significant barriers to recovery.

The NLIHC-led DRHC is comprised of more than 250 local, state, and national organizations, including many working directly with impacted communities in Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and California and with first-hand experience recovering after prior disasters.

We urge you, as leaders of the Appropriations Committees, to add basic safeguards, resources, and tools to help the lowest income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations get back on their feet. Specifically, we ask you to amend the emergency relief bill to fund the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), which provides direct rental assistance and services to help people with the greatest needs find stable, accessible, and healthy homes. Federal agencies should also be required to collect data and make it publicly available to ensure funds are used equitably to address the housing and infrastructure needs of low income people and communities. Specifically designated housing investments, including the National Housing Trust Fund, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, the HOME program, and New Markets Tax Credits - targeted to low income households – are also needed to address the severe shortage of affordable rental homes in these communities. A full list of the DRHC's priorities for the disaster supplemental is available [here](#).

Even before the recent hurricanes and wildfires, the disaster-impacted communities experienced a severe shortage of affordable rental homes for people with the lowest incomes. In Houston and Orlando, there were fewer than 18 affordable and available rental homes for

every 100 extremely low income households. California had the greatest shortage in the country, with a deficit of over 1.1 million homes affordable to its lowest income residents. In Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, poverty gripped 45% and 30% of the population, respectively – far more than the 15% national average. In each of the impacted states and territories, three out of four of the poorest families paid at least half of their limited incomes on rent, leaving few resources for their other basic needs.

The plight of low income families has significantly worsened in the wake of the disasters. Thousands of people are still living in hotels through FEMA's Transitional Shelter program, and others are living in shelters. Many families have resorted to couch-surfing or sleeping in their cars or in "tent cities." Those who were already experiencing homelessness before the storm often have lost their limited resources but have been excluded from many disaster aid programs and now face increasing competition for what scarce resources do exist.

Thank you for your commitment to helping individuals and communities still reeling from the recent disasters. In the coming days, however, we urge you to improve the emergency relief bill by adding safeguards and affordable rental housing resources and tools to help families struggling to recover.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane Yentel".

Diane Yentel
President and CEO
National Low Income Housing Coalition

CC: Senate THUD Chair Susan Collins, Senate THUD Ranking Member Jack Reed, House THUD Chair Mario Diaz-Balart, House THUD Ranking Member David Price