



October 24, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick McHenry  
Speaker Pro Tempore  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

To Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pro Tempore McHenry, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

We – the National Low Income Housing Coalition, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, Enterprise, and the 84 additional national organizations below – urge you to enact the “Reforming Disaster Recovery Act” (S.1686) introduced by Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI), Susan Collins (R-ME), Patty Murray (D-WA), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Jon Tester (D-MT), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Todd Young (R-IN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Alex Padilla (D-CA).and Representative Al Green (D-TX). This bipartisan legislation will make the flow of disaster recovery funds faster, more equitable, and more accountable to taxpayers. The bill was also included in the Senate Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development appropriation bill for FY 2023, and the House version of the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). We ask that this urgent, bipartisan, legislation be included in any emergency disaster supplemental appropriation bill or other must-pass package.

Millions of disaster survivors across the country are facing catastrophic, life-threatening, extreme weather events, including stronger hurricanes, extreme heat, unprecedented drought, and severe wildfires. Just this year there has been 9 separate billion-dollar disasters, including extreme tornado outbreaks in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and across the central US, as well as severe flooding in California, and extreme blizzards in upstate New York. This comes after multiple disasters in 2022, Hurricane Ian along the Florida Coast to catastrophic flooding in East Kentucky, deadly winter storms, and tornado outbreaks leaving behind devastated households and communities across the country.

If enacted, the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act would permanently authorize the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD)’s Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, which provides flexible grants to help cities, counties, and states recover from Presidentially declared disasters and rebuild affordable housing and other infrastructure after a disaster, especially in low-income areas.

Insurance and short-term federal assistance are unable to cover the cost of a disaster for many low-income homeowners, renters, and people experiencing homelessness. State and local governments often struggle to repair infrastructure and facilitate economic development in low-income communities. Many of the lowest-income households – who are disproportionately affected by disasters but receive the least amount of assistance afterward – face homelessness or displacement as shorter-term assistance programs end. As the only source for federal long-term recovery funds, CDBG-DR can fill this gap in assistance and ensure every disaster survivor and their communities are able to fully and equitably recover.

Although other federal agencies have standing resources to quickly serve communities when disasters strike, CDBG-DR funds are only made available through special congressional approval. Due to the program's lack of permanent authorization, HUD must write a new set of regulations to guide state and local grantees each time it appropriates funds. This ad hoc system can delay funding for over three years after a disaster occurs. As a result, recovery timelines are lengthened, economies stagnate, and homelessness and out-migration from disaster-impacted areas increase.

The Reforming Disaster Recovery Act will help ensure that long-term disaster recovery funds are made quickly available after disasters and that all disaster survivors and their communities can fully and equitably recover. The 2019 version of the bill was unanimously passed out of the House Financial Services Committee and was approved by the House of Representatives through a bipartisan vote. HUD and the Government Accountability Office under the past two administrations have agreed that permanently authorizing the CDBG-DR program would vastly improve how the country's most important long-term disaster recovery program operates.

In addition to codifying the CDBG-DR program in statute, the bill contains critical reforms to help ensure a more efficient and equitable disaster recovery and mitigate future risks by:

- Requiring that the use of funds are balanced between infrastructure and housing;
- Ensuring that housing funds are spent proportionally between homeowners and renters;
- Requiring HUD to release information on disaster recovery to the public – disaggregated by income, race, geography and all protected classes of individuals under federal civil rights and nondiscrimination laws;
- Requiring federal agencies to share all data to improve coordination of the disaster recovery process, as well as increase oversight and data transparency;
- Authorizing the creation of a CDBG-DR Reserve Fund that can quickly disperse initial recovery funding post-disaster without waiting for a new congressional action;
- Developing a formula to allocate assistance to the most impacted areas;
- Maintaining the current requirement that 70% of the funds benefit Low and Moderate Income households;
- Creating a capacity building and technical assistance set-aside for grantees;
- Ensuring that state action plans receive at least 14 days for public comment and requiring states to engage with stakeholders in the impacted areas;

- Promoting disaster mitigation and resiliency by establishing an Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilient Communities at HUD;
- Creating a significant set-aside for disaster mitigation activities; and
- Creating specific minimum construction standards for areas designated as hazard prone by HUD and FEMA.

Again, we urge you to support this important bipartisan legislation. By passing the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act, Congress can provide meaningful relief to the millions of disaster survivors most in need.

CC:

Chairman Sherrod Brown, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate  
 Ranking Member Tim Scott, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate  
 Chairman Patrick McHenry, Committee on Financial Services, U.S. House of Representatives  
 Ranking Member Maxine Waters, Committee on Financial Services, U.S. House of Representatives

Sincerely,

***National and Multistate Organizations***

Affordable Homeownership Foundation, Inc.  
 Americans for Financial Reform  
 APRIL  
 Benevolent Rural Alliance for Cultural and Environmental Strategies (B.R.A.C.E.S)  
 Center for Community Progress  
 Center for Independence  
 Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience  
 Coalition of Community Organizations  
 Collaborative solutions  
 Community Change  
 Community Change Action  
 Consumer Action  
 Council of State Community Development Agencies  
 Crisis Cleanup  
 Disaster Justice Network  
 EcoArts Connections  
 Enterprise Community Partners  
 Equal Rights Center  
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
 Fahe  
 Fair Share Housing Center

Green & Healthy Homes Initiative  
Grounded Solutions Network  
Habitat for Humanity International  
Hispanic Federation  
Housing Advisory Group  
Just Solutions Collective  
Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Lowlander Center  
Manufactured Home Institute (MHI)  
MDC, Inc.  
Modular Building Institute  
National Alliance of HUD Tenants  
National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders  
National Community Development Association  
National Council of St. Vincent de Paul  
National Housing Conference  
National Housing Law Project  
National Housing Resource Center  
National Institute of Minority Economic Development  
National Leased Housing Association  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
National NeighborWorks Association  
New Hope Collaborative  
Oxfam America  
Planners for Puerto Rico  
Rebuilding Together  
Research, Policy, & Impact Center  
Rural Community Assistance Corporation  
SBP  
Shimberg Center for Housing Studies - University of Florida  
SPEAK  
The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies  
UnidosUS  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Voices of Community Activists and Leaders  
World Institute on Disability

***State and Local Organizations or Governments***

**Alabama**

Unless U

**California**

Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP)  
County of Sonoma Department of Health Services

**Florida**

Homeless Coalition of Polk County  
Solar Habitats

**Kentucky**

Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky

**Louisiana**

Benevolent Rural Alliance for Cultural and Environmental Strategies (B.R.A.C.E.S)

**Michigan**

Business Men & Women Social Club of Detroit

**Minnesota**

Disaster Justice

**New Jersey**

New Jersey Organizing Project

**New York**

Voices Of Community Activists & Leaders (VOCAL-NY)

**North Carolina**

United Way of Alamance County  
WZA Consultant

**Oregon**

Santiam Integration Team

**Pennsylvania**

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

**Texas**

Air Alliance Houston  
Bayou City Waterkeeper  
Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience  
Fair Housing and Neighborhood Rights  
Harvey Forgotten Survivors Caucus  
HOME Coalition

Northeast Action Collective  
Texas Appleseed  
Texas Housers  
West Street Recovery

**Washington**  
Center for Independence