TOP PRIORITIES FOR DISASTER RECOVERY

NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION

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The National Low Income Housing Coalition and the NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) of more than 900 local, state, and national organizations urges Congress to approve a disaster supplemental package that ensures federal disaster recovery resources reach all impacted households, including the lowest-income and most marginalized disaster survivors who are often the hardest-hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover afterwards.

Congress should include the DHRC's top priorities in any disaster supplemental package:

PRIORITY #1: ROBUSTLY FUND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT – DISASTER RECOVERY (CDBG-DR) PROGRAM TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM RECOVERY.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program helps states and communities recover after a Presidentially declared major disaster. CDBG-DR funds address the "unmet needs" of disaster recovery that may not be met by other federal programs or funding sources. As a long-term, flexible, disaster recovery program, CDBG-DR can focus on the needs of those whose recovery was incomplete, as well as a disaster's broader housing, economic, and infrastructure-related impacts that are unaddressed by short-term recovery programs administered by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other disaster responders.

PRIORITY #2: ACTIVATE THE DISASTER HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (DHAP) TO ENSURE HOUSING STABILITY DURING RECOVERY.

Congress should directly appropriate Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) funds and direct FEMA to activate the program for the lowest-income disaster survivors. One of the top priorities after a disaster is ensuring that disaster survivors have a stable, affordable place to call home while they get back on their feet. Under DHAP, displaced families receive longer-term direct rental assistance and wrap-around case management services provided by local housing professionals with extensive knowledge of the local housing market. This assistance helps families find permanent housing solutions, secure employment, and connect to public benefits as they rebuild their lives.

DHAP was created after hard-won lessons from Hurricane Katrina, and it has been used successfully in major storms since. DHAP has been upheld as a best practice by past Republican and Democratic administrations. DHAP was designed to help low-income disaster survivors who face significant barriers to accessing FEMA's Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) motel program and who need longer-term housing stability to fully recover. TSA is often inaccessible for low-income disaster survivors because hotels charge daily "resort" fees and require security deposits or credit cards – all of which are barriers to low-income households. TSA also relies on arbitrary, short-term deadlines – often giving disaster survivors only a few days- or hours-notice – and creates burdensome hoops that families must jump through to use the program.

Without DHAP, displaced, low-income families often have little choice but to double or triple up with other low-income families, return to uninhabitable homes, or pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent, making it harder to meet their other basic needs. Disaster survivors without stable, affordable homes face a higher risk of evictions and, in worst cases, homelessness. There are numerous accounts of disaster survivors unable to access TSA who set up "tent cities" or who later needed emergency hospital care after returning to mold-infested homes. Families have been pushed into homelessness because they had no place to go.

Despite the clear need, FEMA has refused to activate DHAP in recent years, rejecting requests by Governors, dozens of members of Congress, survivors, and advocates. For more information, see NLIHC's DHAP factsheet and a comparison of DHAP and alternative programs.

PRIORITY #3: ENACT THE BIPARTISAN "REFORMING DISASTER RECOVERY ACT" (S.1686/H.R.5940) TO SPEED UP RECOVERY EFFORTS AND ESTABLISH SAFEGUARDS.

The DHRC supports the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act, 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 Luján (D-NM), Todd Young (R-IN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Alex Padilla (D-CA).

When enacted, the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act would permanently authorize the CDBG-DR program, which provides states, tribes, and communities with flexible, long-term recovery resources needed to rebuild affordable housing and infrastructure after a disaster. The bill also provides important safeguards and tools to help ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes and from the most marginalized groups. Key reforms in the legislation include quickly targeting resources to those with the greatest needs, prioritizing data transparency and oversight, protecting civil rights and fair housing, and encouraging mitigation and resiliency.

PRIORITY #4: PASS THE BIPARTISAN "DISASTER SURVIVOR SIMPLIFICATION ACT" (S.1528) TO ENSURE DISASTER SURVIVORS CAN MORE EASILY ACCESS ASSISTANCE.

The DHRC supports the Disaster Survivor Simplification Act, introduced by Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee Chair Gary Peters (D-MI), Ranking Member Rand Paul (R-KY), and Senators James Lankford (R-OK) and Thom Tillis (R-NC).

The bill would create a universal application for disaster recovery assistance. By directing federal agencies to create a universal aid application, disaster survivors could apply for numerous programs through one form. The bill not only ensures greater accessibility, but it would make the process more efficient.

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