



September 11, 2024

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee:

On behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) and the NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), I write to express our opposition to [H.R. 1605](#), the “Natural Disaster Recovery Program Act,” introduced by Congressmen David Rouzer (NC-07) and Garret Graves (LA-06). While we appreciate their leadership in highlighting the critical importance of long-term recovery and look forward to working with them on ways to improve our nation disaster response and recovery system, we are concerned that H.R. 1605 would create a new FEMA program, which would be largely duplicative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, but far less effective. Funds administered under this new program would lack adequate transparency and oversight, and we are concerned that long-term recovery resources would fail to reach those disaster survivors most in need of assistance. **We urge you to oppose H.R. 1605, and instead, support the passage of the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act ([S.1686/H.R.5940](#)), introduced by Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representative Al Green (D-TX) to further strengthen and streamline the CDBG-DR program.**

NLIHC leads the DHRC, a coalition of over 900 local, state, and national organizations, including many with first-hand experience recovering after disasters, that work to ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach all impacted households, including the lowest-income and most marginalized disaster survivors. NLIHC has worked on disaster recovery issues since 2005.

Based on nearly 20 years of experience, we believe the creation of a new long-term recovery program at FEMA would be a mistake. FEMA’s existing short-term assistance programs largely fail to meet the needs of disaster survivors, especially those with the lowest incomes. FEMA programs are often designed in ways that are inaccessible to disaster survivors who need assistance the most, and the agency fails to provide the basic data transparency needed to improve its current programs. Moreover, FEMA lacks critical experience in long-term housing recovery and an important understanding of housing markets.

H.R. 1605 creates a new program at FEMA without addressing these long-standing barriers and without measures to ensure sufficient oversight regarding how disaster assistance funds

are spent. We are concerned that the bill, as written, may lead to the misuse of scarce federal recovery funds and prevent critically needed long-term recovery assistance from reaching low-income disaster survivors. The only control and oversight over the use of these funds would be a congressional inquiry occurring after half the allocated funds had already been spent. The bill also fails to provide an opportunity for public input from disaster survivors or their communities into how federal funds would be spent.

Instead, we encourage members of Congress to support the bipartisan [Reforming Disaster Recovery Act \(RDRA\) \(S.1686/H.R.5940\)](#). This bill would permanently authorize the CDBG-DR program and put in place important safeguards and reforms to ensure that disaster survivors quickly receive the assistance they need to fully recover. Unlike FEMA, HUD has deep expertise in housing recovery, a long, successful track record of serving households with greatest needs, and established processes for public input. While CDBG-DR resources currently take too long to reach disaster survivors and communities, the changes in RDRA would enable these resources to reach communities more quickly.

NLIHC, the DHRC, and over 400 additional national, state, and local organizations support the passage of the RDRA, which has garnered broad, bipartisan support. The RDRA was included in the Senate Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) appropriations bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 and the House version of the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). A previous version passed on the House floor in 2019. We would greatly appreciate your support for the bill.

With the increasing frequency of hurricanes, flooding, and other disasters, Congress should work to establish a better way for disaster survivors and communities to access the long-term assistance they need more quickly. We appreciate the bill sponsors' interest in facilitating long-term disaster housing recovery, but we do not believe this bill moves our nation in the right direction. Instead, we urge you to cosponsor the bipartisan "Reforming Disaster Recovery Act" to permanently authorize the CDBG-DR program.

Sincerely,

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

Diane Yentel
President and CEO
National Low Income Housing Coalition