

September 17, 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 undersigned national organizations, we write to express our opposition to H.R. 1605, the “Natural Disaster Recovery Program Act,” introduced by Congressman 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's disaster response and recovery system, we are concerned that H.R. 1605 would create a new Federal Emergency Management Agency (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 and that the existence of competing programs would derail efforts to provide critical long-term recovery resources to those most in need of assistance following recent disasters. **We urge you to oppose the ANS containing this bill.**

Based on our collective experience working in support of disaster-impacted communities, we believe the creation of a new long-term recovery program at FEMA would be a mistake. H.R. 1605 creates a new program at FEMA without addressing long-standing barriers to FEMA assistance 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 expertise in housing recovery, a long, successful track record of serving households with the 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.

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 committee's interest in facilitating long-term disaster housing recovery and addressing shortcomings in the country's disaster recovery system, but we do not believe this bill moves our nation in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Affordable Homeownership Foundation Inc.
Anthropocene Alliance
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Coalition for Home Repair
Community Solutions
Consortium for Equitable Disaster Resilience (CEDR)
Consumer Action
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC)
Disaster Justice Network (DJN)
Fair Share Housing Center (FSHC)
Global Alliance for Disaster Resource Acceleration (GADRA)
Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI)
Jewish Women International
Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)
MDC Inc, facilitators of the North Carolina Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network (NCIDR)
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO)
National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities (CNLD)
National Community Development Association
National Consumer Law Center
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Housing Law Project (NHLP)
National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC)
National Wildlife Federation (NWF)
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Organizing Resilience
Protect Our Stolen Treasures (P.O.S.T)
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Shimberg Center for Housing Studies
The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies
The William Averette Anderson Fund
World Institute on Disability (WID)