NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION

October 8, 2021

The Honorable Marcia Fudge
Secretary
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

The Honorable Susan Rice
Director
Domestic Policy Council
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20502

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20024

To Secretary Fudge, Director Rice, and Administrator Criswell:

On behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) and the NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), I urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to immediately activate and implement the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) to stably house the lowest-income and most marginalized survivors of Hurricane Ida.

The DHRC includes more than 850 local, state, and national organizations, including many organizations working directly with disaster-impacted communities and with first-hand experience recovering after disasters. Together, we work to ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes.

HUD's DHAP program is specifically designed to address the medium- and longer-term housing needs of the lowest-income and most marginalized survivors of natural disasters. DHAP was created after hard-won lessons from Hurricane Katrina and has been used successfully to help disaster survivors after Hurricanes Ike, Rita, and Gustav and Superstorm Sandy. Under DHAP, displaced families receive longer-term direct rental assistance and case management services provided by local housing professionals with extensive knowledge of the local and regional housing market. This assistance helps families find permanent housing solutions, secure employment, and connect to public benefits as they rebuild their lives.

Only HUD has the expertise and capacity needed to assist FEMA in addressing the housing needs of low-income disaster survivors. HUD has decades of experience providing housing opportunities to some of our nation’s most marginalized individuals – including the lowest-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and others – who are often the hardest-hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover afterwards. Moreover, HUD’s national network of nearly 3,800 local

housing agencies makes the agency best equipped to quickly respond to the housing needs of survivors, including those who have been displaced to new communities, often across state lines. In the past, DHAP has been activated within two weeks of a disaster.

Past Republican and Democratic administrations upheld DHAP as a best practice for disaster recovery. Under the Trump administration, however, FEMA refused to enter into an agreement with HUD to stand up the program, despite the clear benefits. Instead of activating DHAP, the Trump administration relied on FEMA's Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) Program and Individuals and Housing Program (IHP) – programs that are often inaccessible to disaster survivors with the lowest incomes and are often difficult or slow to implement at the scale needed to address critical housing needs after a major disaster. Without access to the affordable, stable housing they needed, many survivors were forced to return to uninhabitable homes, sleep in cars or tents, stay at shelters, double- or triple-up with other low-income families, or pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent, putting them at increased risk of eviction and, in worst cases, homelessness. In some communities, homelessness increased by as much as 18% after a major disaster because families were unable to access affordable homes while they tried to get back on their feet.

To ensure a complete and equitable recovery, FEMA and HUD must move quickly to establish and implement the DHAP program to address the longer-term housing needs of disaster survivors. Failure to provide effective housing assistance for disaster survivors will disproportionately harm people of color and members of other historically marginalized communities – who are more likely to be precariously housed before a disaster occurs and least able to access FEMA resources after a disaster. Activating DHAP for the lowest-income and most marginalized survivors is an important step towards a more equitable federal disaster housing recovery framework – a goal shared by the Biden administration.

For more information, please feel free to contact NLIHC Vice President Sarah Saadian (ssaadian@nlihc.org) at any time.

Sincerely,



Diane Yentel
President and CEO
National Low Income Housing Coalition