



September 29, 2021

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20472

To Administrator Criswell:

On behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) and the NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), thank you for the recent [changes](#) FEMA made to the Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG) to address long-standing barriers that have prevented the lowest-income and most marginalized disaster survivors from receiving the assistance they need to recover. By allowing for easier verification of ownership and occupancy, as well as expanding home repair assistance to include mold removal and the construction of home accessibility measures, FEMA has taken a long-overdue and necessary first step towards building a more equitable federal disaster housing recovery framework. As you [stated](#) when announcing this policy change, however, “this is a culture shift for the agency and we are only just beginning.” To assist you in your efforts to further ensure FEMA programs equitably serve all disaster survivors – including members of historically marginalized communities – we request a meeting to discuss much needed reforms.

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 and those who are most marginalized.

When disasters occur, the lowest-income and most marginalized survivors are often hardest hit. They have the fewest resources and face the longest, steepest path to recovery. Despite the clear need, federal efforts frequently leave these survivors without the assistance needed to recover and leave their communities less resilient to future disasters. The result is a disaster housing recovery framework that exacerbates and [reinforces racial, income, and accessibility inequities](#) at each stage of response and recovery.

Earlier this year, the DHRC shared with you a [memorandum](#) outlining critically needed actions FEMA can take administratively to reform programs to ensure that the lowest-income and most marginalized survivors receive the assistance they need to fully and equitably recover. These recommendations were created through the direct input of DHRC members working in disaster-impacted areas to assist disaster survivors in navigating the various disaster recovery programs offered by FEMA. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss with you these reforms in more detail.

Again, thank you for your commitment to ensuring equity in FEMA programs. We share your goal of a disaster recovery framework that is accessible to all, and we hope that the experience and expertise of the DHRC can help assist you and FEMA in reaching that goal.

My staff will follow up with you to schedule a meeting. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to reach out to me directly at dyentel@nlihc.org or NLIHC's Vice President of Policy Sarah Saadian at ssaadian@nlihc.org.

Sincerely,

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

Diane Yentel
President and CEO
National Low Income Housing Coalition