



June 3, 2020

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gary Peters
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

To Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Peters, Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

I write on behalf of NLIHC's Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition to urge you to include in any coronavirus relief package provisions to provide full reimbursement for FEMA Public Assistance (PA) emergency protective measures and legislative language requiring FEMA to immediately publish guidance regarding compliance with duplication of benefits requirements and make other critical information and data publicly available. NLIHC supports the reimbursement provision included in the House-passed "Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act." I also urge you to include legislation to improve FEMA's confusing and daunting application process so individuals can receive the assistance for which they are entitled. The "Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act" (H.R. 2914) passed unanimously out of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in February 2020.

The DHRC is led by the National Low Income Housing Coalition and includes over 850 national, state, and local organizations dedicated to ensuring the federal response to disaster recovery prioritizes the housing needs of the lowest-income survivors. Together, we work to ensure full and equitable recovery for America's lowest-income and most marginalized survivors and communities, who are often the hardest hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover afterward. The DHRC has been working with state and local partners to quickly mobilize to address the urgent health and housing needs of America's lowest-income renters and people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.

Congress must take every action to save lives and prevent outbreaks of coronavirus among people experiencing homelessness and other individuals living in congregate settings. People experiencing homelessness who contract coronavirus are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die than others in the general public. To address the urgent health and housing needs of people experiencing homelessness and other individuals, Congress provided critical resources in the "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act," including FEMA PA funds. Despite congressional efforts, many states, local governments, and homeless service providers continue to face barriers to effectively and efficiently using these resources, with enormous implications for individuals, communities, and our collective public health.

The next coronavirus package should include provisions in the HEROES Act to direct FEMA to provide full reimbursement to state and local governments for PA emergency protective measures. These provisions would cover all eligible PA costs allow FEMA to provide assistance in advance

rather than requiring states to be reimbursed later. These provisions would enable eligible states, localities, and nonprofit organizations to provide essential health and housing services to individuals experiencing homelessness.

In addition, Congress should require FEMA to immediately issue guidance regarding compliance with federal duplication of benefit requirements. FEMA's failure to release such guidance has unnecessarily slowed down the best efforts by state and local governments and homeless service providers to use the flexible federal resources provided in the CARES Act – including FEMA PA grants, HUD Emergency Solutions Grants and Community Development Block Grants, Treasury-administered Coronavirus Relief Funds – to move people experiencing homelessness out of shelters or encampments and into non-congregate spaces for self-isolation and self-quarantine. FEMA guidance should clearly provide the broadest flexibility possible to combine flexible federal CARES Act resources. Overly rigid duplication of benefits requirements will prevent critical resources from reaching survivors with the most acute needs.

Congress should include legislative language requiring full transparency from FEMA on all materials related to state reimbursements for non-congregate sheltering. At a minimum, FEMA should be required to make publicly available on a monthly basis the number of people currently housed in FEMA-reimbursable hotels and other non-congregate shelters by state; the number of people who were previously experiencing homelessness prior to participation in the non-congregate shelter program by state; and copies of every state request for non-congregate shelter and every letter of approval and/or denial by FEMA. They agency should be directed to develop and make publicly available plans to ensure that individuals have permanent, stable housing prior to ending FEMA assistance. Requiring FEMA to report this data will help policymakers and service providers better understand FEMA's role in providing non-congregate shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Beyond these immediate and urgent priorities, we also urge you to include the "Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act" (H.R. 2914) in the next coronavirus relief bill. This legislation – which passed unanimously out of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in February 2020 – would reform FEMA's application process allow survivors to more easily navigate this process. The bill also addresses FEMA's failure to overcome long-standing and repeated title documentation challenges that have resulted in tens of thousands of eligible survivors being wrongfully denied FEMA assistance in recent years. It is vital that Congress enact this bill immediately, given the start 2020 hurricane season.

Including these key FEMA provisions in the next coronavirus relief package would help state and local governments meet the urgent and severe health and housing needs of people experiencing homelessness and other marginalized survivors and reform long-standing barriers to FEMA assistance. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact NLIHC 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