

# TOP 10 QUESTIONS FOR FEMA ADMINISTRATOR BROCK LONG

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is scheduled to hold a hearing with FEMA Administrator Brock Long on the Trump administration's failed response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and other 2017 disasters.

The Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition works to ensure that federal recovery efforts reach all survivors, including those with the lowest incomes who are often hardest hit and have the fewest resources to recover. Below are our top 10 questions for FEMA Administrator Brock Long on the agency's continued refusal to address the short- and longer-term housing needs of low income survivors.

## REFUSING TO ACTIVATE PROVEN HOUSING SOLUTIONS

The [Disaster Housing Assistance Program](#) (DHAP) plays a critical role in providing safe, decent, and affordable homes to some of our nation's most vulnerable individuals and families after a disaster. This includes low income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and other at-risk populations. DHAP was created after Hurricane Katrina and has been used after major disasters since that time. DHAP has been upheld as a best practice by [past Democratic](#) and [Republican administrations](#).

1. The Governor of Puerto Rico [requested DHAP](#) in December 2017 for families displaced from Puerto Rico to the U.S. mainland. Dozens of members of Congress and hundreds of survivors and advocates have also requested DHAP. Yet, FEMA rejected these calls for help. **Why did FEMA ignore the voices of those most impacted by the disasters and those on the ground who are in the best position to know what solutions were needed?**
2. FEMA claims that DHAP is not needed because state-administered programs are available. A new [GAO report](#) cites significant capacity issues at the state level that have resulted in major delays and failures. Moreover, [none of these resources](#) are available to Puerto Rican families displaced to the U.S. mainland or other survivors displaced across state lines. **Why did FEMA ask states to design, implement, and scale brand new disaster housing programs when federal solutions are already in place?**
3. FEMA also claims that DHAP is unnecessary because FEMA provides rental assistance. But, there are [significant differences](#) between the two programs, and DHAP is far more effective for low income survivors. FEMA's program provides assistance equal to two months' rent. After covering the cost of application fees and security deposits, many survivors are left with no direct rental support. In contrast, DHAP provides survivors the longer-term rental assistance needed to find stable, affordable rental homes on the private market. **Why is FEMA relying on its rental assistance program, when DHAP is clearly more effective for low income survivors?**
4. Without DHAP, many families have had no choice but to double or triple up with other families, sleep in cars, or pay more than half of their income on rent, putting them at higher risk of [evictions and homelessness](#). **How does this help them get back on their feet after a major disaster?**
5. FEMA's experiment of shifting responsibility for disaster housing recovery to the states has been a failure, as outlined in a recent [GAO report](#). **At what point will FEMA reconsider the use of DHAP to respond to the needs of displaced households? What factors/criteria will prompt a change in position?**

## RELYING ON SHELTERING PROGRAMS THAT EXCLUDE LOW INCOME SURVIVORS

6. Low income households face significant barriers accessing FEMA's transitional shelter assistance (TSA). Participating hotels charge daily "resort" fees, require security deposits, and require that displaced households have credit cards - all of which are barriers for low income households that have already depleted any savings that they may have had and that are often unbanked or underbanked. There are numerous accounts of individuals that were unable to access FEMA's TSA program that later needed emergency hospital care after returning to mold-infested homes. Other families set up "tent cities" because they had no place to go. **What specific reforms is FEMA implementing to overcome financial barriers that prevent low income families from accessing FEMA's TSA program?**
7. Earlier this year, FEMA attempted to abruptly end TSA for thousands of disaster survivors in June 2018, even if they had nowhere else to go. In his decision to deny an injunction against FEMA, Judge Timothy S. Hillman stated, "While this is the result that I am compelled to find, it is not necessarily the right result. However, the Court cannot order that Defendants do that which in a humanitarian and caring world should be done-- it can only order the Defendants to do that which the law requires." **How do you justify ending TSA hotels for survivors, while also denying them access to other longer-term housing solutions like DHAP?**

## DENYING SURVIVORS INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE

Of the nearly 1.2 million applications for FEMA's Individual Assistance program stemming from Hurricane Maria, roughly [60 percent](#) were found ineligible - nearly twice the rate of denial after Hurricane Harvey. A main reason is disparity is the large number of survivors in Puerto Rico live in "informal" housing or do not have title to their homes. While FEMA now accepts alternative documentation to show proof of homeownership and has agreed to reassess denials of appeals, FEMA is not taking steps to notify households who have been denied IA because of title issues that they may reapply for assistance.

8. Thousands of Puerto Rican survivors were denied FEMA assistance because of the agency's misunderstanding of the territory's probate estate law. **Do you agree that FEMA has the responsibility to notify survivors of FEMA's mistake and that they may in fact be eligible for assistance? What is FEMA doing to fulfill this responsibility?**
9. Instead of notifying survivors to let them know that they may reapply for IA, FEMA is putting this burden on outside groups, including nonprofit organizations and legal aid attorneys. This raises serious due process issues. **Will FEMA commit to notifying all survivors previously denied assistance for land title issues to let them know that they can reapply for assistance? Will FEMA ensure that every survivor who was previously denied assistance because of title issues gets a copy of the new form that they can use to reapply?**
10. **In other disasters where there has been a change in acceptable proof of ownership, how has that change been announced and implemented? Is that happening now in Puerto Rico?**