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Gulf Coast Hurricane Recovery

Addressing Unmet Housing Needs and Improving Housing Response in Future Disasters

Background:

The federal government has the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance for those displaced during catastrophic disasters, as well as to lead long-term disaster recovery in a way that meets the needs of all displaced persons, with special attention to vulnerable populations, until conditions associated with displacement end. The response to hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike, Gustav and Dolly demonstrated that the need for a plan to address initial disaster response and long-term disaster recovery is a matter of national security and importance. State authorities, localities and municipalities are not equipped to prepare for and to cope with disaster recovery on a catastrophic scale.

It is imperative that future federal disaster recovery better address the housing needs of people with the lowest incomes and vulnerable populations such as people of color, the elderly and persons with disabilities. However, before the future of disaster recovery can be sincerely addressed we must remind all legislators that each of the Gulf Coast states have unmet, outstanding critical housing needs from the 2005 and 2008 hurricanes.

The federal government must devise a national plan for future disasters that improves the inadequate National Disaster Housing Strategy that FEMA released in January 2009. Furthermore, HUD should articulate a plan and identify resources to provide one-for-one replacement of all pre-storm federally assisted homes that serve people below 50% AMI. The plan must include a process for creating high quality, mixed-income developments, located on former public housing sites, which does not decrease the stock of deeply affordable homes. There is an overall lack of rental housing that is affordable for households with extremely low incomes on the Gulf Coast. Therefore, strong federal support is absolutely necessary in order to expand the supply of affordable housing and ensure adequate recovery for all residents.

Hearings on the failings of the 2005 disaster response, as related to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), continued in 2010. On September 23, 2011, Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) introduced S. 1630, the Disaster Recovery Act of 2011 which would reform the Stafford Act. NLIHC and many members of the Katrina Housing Group have endorsed the legislation that includes many, but not all of the provisions advocated for by Gulf Coast housing recovery advocates and bill's chances for passage remain to be seen. Also on September 23, 2011, FEMA released the final National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF), which outlines the process by which the federal government supports disaster recovery efforts.

Request for appropriations for outstanding Gulf Coast housing needs:

- Provide housing recovery funds to Alabama, the only Katrina-affected Gulf Coast state not to receive additional funds in 2008.

- Provide funds for a HUD-conducted needs assessment of Alabama, which has never been done. Alabama officials and advocates agree that unmet housing needs are at least \$110 million but could be as high as \$500 million.
- Designate additional disaster recovery funding solely for the redevelopment of housing affordable to households with extremely low incomes, including public and assisted housing to be administered through HUD's HOME program.
- Designate funds for pre-disaster mitigation to enable households with the lowest incomes to mitigate against loss from future disasters.

Request authorizing legislation to:

- Enact legislation to solve two issues with Gulf Opportunity (GO) Zone tax credits: extension of the placed-in-service deadline and inclusion in the Tax Credit Exchange Program (TCEP).
- Require one-for-one replacement of all damaged/destroyed public and assisted housing units and a right to return for former residents.
- Prohibit both FEMA and HUD from using "deferred maintenance" standards when awarding disaster recovery assistance to households with low incomes. This standard disproportionately prevents households with low incomes, people of color, and the elderly from receiving housing disaster recovery assistance.
- Incentivize pre-disaster mitigation efforts for people with the lowest incomes by providing federal matches for communities and municipalities that designate that other HUD disaster assistance dollars for mitigation efforts be targeted at low income homeowners through HUD's Disaster Relief Enhancement Fund (DREF) in order to encourage communities to ensure vulnerable homeowners are better prepared for and protected against destruction and damage from future storms.

Strengthen the nation's housing response in future disasters:

- Amend the Stafford Act to:
 - Establish a post-disaster rental repair program that will help communities quickly respond to housing needs in future disasters.
 - Require HUD to develop a National Housing Stock Plan that will identify available housing for rent with disaster housing assistance.
 - Clearly define HUD, state, and local public housing agencies' responsibilities and increase their resources to respond to housing needs of people with low incomes in future disasters.
 - Require future disaster recovery housing funds to be administered through HUD's HOME program to ensure that housing recovery dollars are expended on actual housing needs and that CDBG sub-grantees are not allowed to use the flexibility of the CDBG program to divert housing funds into non-housing uses.
 - Provide pre-disaster mitigation assistance for people with the lowest incomes to prepare their homes to better withstand future disasters.
- Continue to oversee the National Disaster Housing Joint Task Force and comment on the Task Force's National Disaster Housing Strategy (NDHS) implementation plan and efforts.