

GULF COAST HOUSING RECOVERY FACT SHEET

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.

Urge Congress to:

- Quickly pass and enact S. 1630, the Disaster Recovery to ensure that the housing needs of victims of future disasters are met. The following provisions of the bill are particularly important:
 - The clear definition of when a disaster is considered to be catastrophic and sets up mechanisms to ensure an appropriate federal role.
 - The requirement that FEMA, HHS, and HUD develop a single, comprehensive case management system and within one year develop regulations to ensure that every survivor has a single point of contact for case management services.
 - The changes to the housing response and recovery activities authorized under the Stafford Act intended to minimize the time that households are in temporary housing and ensure a seamless transition for these households to new permanent housing.