

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 17, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Chairman DeFazio:

We write to express our support for emergency disaster supplemental appropriations due to the ramifications of Hurricane Ida and respectfully request that such act eliminate barriers to federal disaster relief caused by title-documentation challenges. We recommend doing so by including language put forth in H.R. 3037 – *the Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act of 2021*, which recently passed through the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure with bipartisan support.

Ida's consequences are far reaching, especially as we mourn the tragic loss of 82 Americans across eight states¹- a death toll we fear is steadily rising. In the aftermath of the natural disaster, New York, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Texas have deployed substantial resources for critical infrastructure repairs such as power restoration, reopening of roads, and public transportation recovery. While the country continues to survey the economic damage of the storm, it is estimated Ida's total cost could figure as high as \$95 billion²—if not higher.

Identifying this significant impact, compounded by a decade of unprecedented natural disasters and a global pandemic, we must also recognize the hurdles that families face when trying to rebuild their lives and receive desperately needed aid. We have heard from our constituents that being denied FEMA disaster assistance due to title-documentation issues has left them stranded in dire times- searching for safe, stable, and affordable housing. In the rural South alone, FEMA has rejected up to a quarter of applicants because they cannot document ownership³ and in Puerto Rico roughly 77,000 households were denied assistance following the devastating Hurricane Maria for the same issue. As we work to

¹ *Ida latest: 82 dead in 8 states, power slowly returns after storm.* (2021, September 8). ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/ida-latest-69-dead-states-power-slowly-returns/story?id=79870885>

² Stevens, P. (2021, September 8). *Hurricane Ida's damage tally could top \$95 billion, making it 7th costliest hurricane since 2000.* CNBC News. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/08/hurricane-idas-damage-tally-could-top-95-billion-making-it-7th-costliest-hurricane-since-2000-.html>

³ Dreier, H., & Tran, A. B. (2021, July 11). *'The real damage.'* Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/07/11/fema-black-owned-property/>

build back better, it is critical that we modernize our disaster relief programs to ensure that every family receives the much-needed assistance they require.

Recently, FEMA amended its Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG) to allow multiple forms of documentation to prove ownership⁴. H.R. 3037 would codify and expand this timely FEMA policy which allows disaster survivors to use a “declarative statement” form attesting to their ownership of the property or through the submission of utility bills, credit card statements, pay stubs, and school registration. The FEMA policy applies retroactively to August 23, though H.R. 3037 would extend that timeframe back to 2017. These changes ensure that disaster survivors with low incomes would be able to access the assistance they need without being forced to endure a lengthy and complicated title clearing process or otherwise go without aid⁵.

As we prepare to see more natural disasters brought on by the climate crisis, it is imperative that that the aid we offer is inclusive and accessible. H.R. 3037 – *the Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act of 2021* is commonsense legislation that modernizes our disaster relief programs and will improve the immediate health and safety of thousands of US citizens across the country. It will allow the federal government to continue serving low-income individuals and communities of color who face unimaginable situations after natural disasters. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working together to address this crisis.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

⁴ *DHS Announces Changes to Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors*. (2021, September 2). Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2021/09/02/dhs-announces-changes-individual-assistance-policies-advance-equity-disaster>

⁵ *Lawmakers Reintroduce Bill to Increase Access to FEMA Disaster Assistance*. (2021, May 24). National Low Income Housing Coalition. <https://nlihc.org/resource/lawmakers-reintroduce-bill-increase-access-fema-disaster-assistance>