

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2022

The Honorable Deanne Criswell  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20472

The Honorable Marcia Fudge  
Secretary  
Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Administrator Criswell and Secretary Fudge:

We write to inquire about the status of the Disaster Assistance and Supportive Housing (DASH) program, a partnership between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that was announced earlier this year to provide critical assistance to low-income disaster survivors.<sup>1</sup> We are concerned that despite FEMA and HUD's intention of making the program available for the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season, which is expected to produce above-normal storm activity,<sup>2</sup> program implementation appears to have stalled.<sup>3</sup> Hurricane Fiona, which has devastated Puerto Rican communities still recovering from Hurricane Maria,<sup>4</sup> and which may have killed up to 16 people,<sup>5</sup> is cause for increased urgency for the establishment of this program. We urge FEMA and HUD to implement and activate DASH as rapidly as possible to guarantee that necessary resources are available for Hurricane Fiona survivors and survivors of future disasters.

Following Hurricane Katrina, FEMA and HUD entered into an interagency agreement to create the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), a supplement to FEMA's existing suite of post-disaster assistance programs that supplied victims with housing vouchers and case management services.<sup>6</sup> Housing advocates have identified this program as being essential to filling the service gaps in FEMA's existing programs that left low-income survivors vulnerable.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, since 2013, FEMA has failed to renew the interagency agreement that activates DHAP on grounds that the program is less efficient than FEMA's own housing programs – a

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Post, "New FEMA program would place homeless disaster survivors in apartments instead of trailer parks," Hannah Dreier, January 16, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/01/16/disaster-survivors-fema-housing-trailers-apartments/>.

<sup>2</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "NOAA still expects above-normal Atlantic hurricane season," August 4, 2022, <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-still-expects-above-normal-atlantic-hurricane-season>.

<sup>3</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, Letter to Biden Administration regarding DASH implementation, June 7, 2022, [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Letter\\_Biden\\_Administration\\_DASH\\_Implementation\\_6\\_7\\_22.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Letter_Biden_Administration_DASH_Implementation_6_7_22.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Washington Post, "Five years ago, Maria hit Puerto Rico. Here are the startling numbers," Kasha Patel, September 20, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/09/20/hurricane-fiona-live-updates-storm-track/#link-BEVNOSWAXFBZLGQ2QUXFDOM3JQ>.

<sup>5</sup> New York Times, "Nine days after Hurricane Fiona, many in Puerto Rico are still without power," Derrick Bryson Taylor, September 27, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/us/hurricane-fiona-puerto-rico-blackouts.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, "Does FEMA Need More Help from HUD in Disaster Housing Assistance? An Overview of DHAP," Owen Minott, April 21, 2022, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/71864/>.

<sup>7</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Disaster Housing Assistance Program, October 31, 2017, <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/DAHP-Program.pdf>.

claim that the Government Accountability Office could not substantiate.<sup>8</sup> By standing up DASH, a program modeled after DHAP, FEMA and HUD can better ensure the lowest-income households have “safe, decent, and affordable rental homes while they rebuild their lives” after disasters.<sup>9</sup>

We are strong supporters of FEMA’s work to integrate equity into its disaster recovery programs. Our bill, the *Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act*,<sup>10</sup> which passed favorably out of committee in the House earlier this Congress,<sup>11</sup> would protect and improve FEMA’s recent policy changes that address systemic inequities in access to federal assistance following disasters.<sup>12</sup> We are deeply concerned that without DASH, FEMA’s existing suite of disaster housing assistance programs will fail to reach or meaningfully assist low-income disaster survivors. FEMA’s Transitional Shelter Assistance Program (TSA) and FEMA’s temporary housing programs have been recognized by housing advocates as insufficient and inaccessible for many low-income disaster survivors.<sup>13</sup> Your agencies have acknowledged these deficiencies, with one HUD spokesperson stating, “HUD and FEMA have identified a service gap for the most vulnerable disaster survivors, and we agree that there is a clear need. Our agencies have collaborated in the past to provide similar assistance, and we are pleased to once again partner.”<sup>14</sup> DASH, if implemented in a timely fashion, will provide the clearest opportunity to close that service gap.

Given that climate change is resulting in a rapidly increasing number of natural disasters,<sup>15</sup> which disproportionately impact low-income communities of color,<sup>16</sup> we are concerned that the delay in activating DASH will result in more harm and slower recoveries for marginalized communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Does FEMA Need More Help from HUD in Disaster Housing Assistance? An Overview of DHAP,” Owen Minott, April 21, 2022, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/71864/>; Government Accountability Office, “Disaster Housing: Improved Cost Data and Guidance Would Aid FEMA Activation Decisions,” December 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-116.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, “NLIHC and DHRC Send Letter to Biden Administration on Stalled Disaster Housing Assistance Program,” press release, June 13, 2022, <https://nlihc.org/resource/nlihc-and-dhrc-send-letter-biden-administration-stalled-disaster-housing-assistance>.

<sup>10</sup> Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act, H.R. 3037, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3037>.

<sup>11</sup> House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, “T&I Committee Advances Multiple Bills During Markup, Including Legislation to Prevent a Race to the Bottom in International Civil Aviation,” press release, July 28, 2021, <https://transportation.house.gov/news/press-releases/tandi-committee-advances-multiple-bills-during-markup-including-legislation-to-prevent-a-race-to-the-bottom-in-international-civil-aviation>.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Emergency Management Administration, “FEMA Makes Changes to Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors,” press release, September 2, 2021, <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210902/fema-makes-changes-individual-assistance-policies-advance-equity-disaster>.

<sup>13</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Does FEMA Need More Help from HUD in Disaster Housing Assistance? An Overview of DHAP,” Owen Minott, April 21, 2022, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/71864/>.

<sup>14</sup> Washington Post, “New FEMA program would place homeless disaster survivors in apartments instead of trailer parks,” Hannah Dreier, January 16, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/01/16/disaster-survivors-fema-housing-trailers-apartments/>.

<sup>15</sup> World Meteorological Organization, “Weather-related disasters increase over past 50 years, causing more damage but fewer deaths,” press release, August 31, 2021, <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/weather-related-disasters-increase-over-past-50-years-causing-more-damage-fewer>.

<sup>16</sup> Shriver Center on Poverty Law, “What Natural Disasters Reveal About Racism and Poverty,” Kate Walz, October 12, 2017, <https://www.povertylaw.org/article/what-natural-disasters-reveal-about-racism-and-poverty-2/>.

Survivors’ advocates have found that without the additional housing assistance, individuals from these communities are often forced to “return to uninhabitable homes, sleep in cars or tents, stay at shelters, double- or triple-up with other low-income families, or pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent, putting them at increased risk of eviction and, in worst cases, homelessness.”<sup>17</sup> By implementing DASH and ensuring supportive services reach the most marginalized communities, FEMA and HUD would advance the Biden administration’s effort to advance racial equity in disaster responses and provide disaster assistance where it is needed most.<sup>18</sup>

We recognize and appreciate your efforts on behalf of low-income disaster survivors. However, we urge you to immediately resume work to implement DASH and to activate the program in response to Hurricane Fiona. We also request that you provide our staff with an update on FEMA and HUD’s efforts to implement DASH, and a timeline for the proposed implementation, by October 12, 2022.

Sincerely,



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

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<sup>17</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition and Fair Share Housing Center, “Fixing America’s Broken Disaster Recovery System,” October 28, 2019, pp. 8, [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Fixing-Americas-Broken-Disaster-Housing-Recovery-System\\_P1.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Fixing-Americas-Broken-Disaster-Housing-Recovery-System_P1.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> White House, “Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” January 20, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>.