
**PERMANENT, SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING & CASE MANAGEMENT
NEEDED IMMEDIATELY FOR KATRINA/RITA DISPLACED FAMILIES**

Dear Federal, State, and Local Leaders:

We, the undersigned groups, are writing because of the urgent situation facing displaced residents across the Gulf Coast. By the end of May and soon thereafter, thousands of families across the Gulf Coast will lose housing. In Louisiana, 578 families will lose temporary housing in FEMA trailer group sites by May 31st; FEMA also plans to close all remaining commercial trailer sites throughout Louisiana quickly, impacting over 1,900 families. A total of 17,000 families are still left in trailers in Louisiana. In Mississippi, there are approximately 7,500 families still in the FEMA trailers and the majority are being told by FEMA housing advisors that they must move now without any specific date. In Alabama, over 3,000 displaced families face uncertain deadlines. The absence of consistent and constructive case management continues to prevent families from accessing the resources they need to make a successful transition to permanent housing. The inflated cost of housing coupled with a severe shortage of affordable housing continues to create a growing homeless population. *We respectfully request immediate attention to this situation.*

Commitments have been made over the last six months to ensure the successful transition of FEMA trailer residents into permanent housing. Unfortunately, action on those commitments has not been consistently implemented and many families continue to fall through the cracks.

On February 14, 2008, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced its intent to expedite plans to provide alternative housing for residents living in FEMA trailer and mobile home sites. At the same time, preliminary findings were released from a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study indicating that high levels of formaldehyde were present in the FEMA-provided trailers and mobile homes, which could be dangerous to the health of occupants. *Undersigned groups request FEMA make good on the following commitments it made that day:*

“As part of the relocation system currently in place, and its expansion, FEMA will carry out the following actions where necessary:

- Enter in to direct contracts with hotels in order to **obtain the needed hotel/motel capacity.**
- Utilize contract resources to **support local relocation.**
- **Provide food vouchers and stipends.**
- Enter into **direct lease agreements with landlords.**
- Contract for **temporary storage and/or shipping of household property.**
- Contract for the **boarding and care of household pets** for families relocated to hotels or apartments that don't allow pets.
- **Provide furniture for rental units** by working with Voluntary Agencies where possible, and will purchase the furniture when necessary.
- Contract for **moving teams and equipment** to assist in the movement of households with special medical needs.
- **Provide additional staff** to our offices on the ground to facilitate and manage the expedited relocation of households.”

Following this announcement, FEMA has in fact, stepped up its efforts to move families out of trailers. In some cases, citizens have been placed and later evicted from hotels after the 30 day voucher has expired. They have received no additional rental assistance and no assistance covering deposits. In many cases, trailer residents have found it very difficult to find suitable housing. Seniors and special needs residents who require additional supports, have reported that they have not received the support FEMA promised. Even residents who have complained about health problems related to formaldehyde have not received many of the services FEMA promised to provide.

As a basic matter, these commitments must be fulfilled by FEMA and other federal and state agencies. We, the undersigned groups, stand together to call on FEMA to fulfill the commitments it made on February 14th for every displaced family– whether or not they are complaining about health problems related to formaldehyde. We also call on the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to coordinate its efforts with FEMA in assisting families to make a successful transition to the Disaster Housing Assistance Program before they leave their trailers.

In Louisiana: Renaissance Village FEMA trailer residents in Baker organized a meeting of over 350 people to present a “Housing Transition Plan” last December. As a result, federal, state and local officials pledged to organize on-site resources bringing FEMA and HUD caseworkers together with an array of social service agencies to provide an *integrated case management initiative*. These commitments have only recently been acted upon by the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), FEMA, and HUD as they launch six *Housing Information Sessions* across the state to “streamline the transition process with no interruption in service.” We will expect these sessions to produce permanent housing options before people are forced to leave their trailers versus 30 day hotel vouchers with no additional support guaranteed. We acknowledge the leadership of the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) thus far to coordinate the efforts of state agencies and to negotiate with federal agencies on behalf of the people of Louisiana. We also acknowledge the good faith efforts of the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps as it prepares to coordinate a statewide integrated case management program and we call on them to exert leadership now to leverage existing resources. We appeal to FEMA to release funds to launch this initiative immediately. We also acknowledge the partnership many of us have had with The Louisiana Housing Finance Agency and the Louisiana Department of Social Services and we call on them to exert leadership in this time of emergency.

In Mississippi: In Mississippi housing advocates have determined that FEMA is failing to affirmatively inform residents of an available means to cover the cost of deposits under a program called CLC Prime. The conflicting and inconsistent manner in which FEMA and its housing advisers communicate with the tenants leads to confusion, panic, and unnecessary harm to these vulnerable displaced storm victims. We call upon FEMA to publicize the full panoply of available options, including deposit programs such as CLC Prime to all residents. In addition, we acknowledge that Mississippi secured the majority of funding for an alternative housing program that produced the so-called “MEMA Cottage.” We now learn that the supply of available Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) cottages under the current funding has been exhausted, despite the existence of a waiting list of eligible households. We urge MEMA and the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) to work together to secure additional funding to provide MEMA cottages for all eligible households so that they may escape the unhealthy conditions they currently endure in FEMA trailers. We urge MDA to consider reprogramming some of its other funds towards this objective on an emergency basis.

In Alabama: Katrina CDBG funds allocated to the City and County of Mobile will serve less than 10% of the 1200 families who applied for this federal rebuilding relief over a year ago; about 136 of these applicants’ homes were totally destroyed; and there are likely hundreds of others who did not make the deadline. Also excluded from the Katrina CDBG application process was the historic African American

community of Trinity Gardens. Moreover, none of these funds have yet to rebuild or repair any of the homes of the 1200 families who continue to suffer greatly. Four grass roots groups representing Alabama Katrina Victims/advocates finally heard some good news. Staff from Senator Shelby and the Senate Banking Committee informed them that *Shelby had asked the Senate Appropriations Committee for additional Katrina recovery funding based on the information they had provided*; and that the Senator's current request of \$50 million for Alabama Katrina CDBG funds is only a fraction of the current unmet needs in Alabama.

The minimal commitments made by FEMA in February are not sufficient to achieve full recovery and resettlement for all displaced residents on the Gulf Coast. Because of the urgency of this situation, we call on FEMA, other federal agencies and leaders, as well as state and local agencies and leaders, work to ensure the following:

Immediate safe, affordable, permanent housing for all displaced residents currently being forced out of FEMA trailers or who are otherwise homeless - not temporary housing or hotels – as well as case management and assistance with security deposits, furniture and appliances, utility deposits, transportation and moving expenses;

Long-term resettlement plan for safe, affordable housing for all residents, especially taking into account vulnerable populations, including senior citizens and people with special needs, as well developing a monitoring and reporting system

International health registry, health studies and medical care for all residents who have lived in FEMA trailers since 2005, especially focusing on children. See Report by Louisiana Justice Institute and Children's Defense Fund – No Way to Treat Our People: FEMA Trailer Residents 30 Months After Katrina, www.louisianajusticeinstitute.org/publications.

We invite you to meet with us to discuss these issues immediately and to attend a **press conference at the Christ Church Cathedral, 2919 St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana, on Thursday, May 29th at 1:30pm**. We encourage you to report on your efforts to address these issues.

Yours truly,

The Advocacy Center (Louisiana's Protection and Advocacy Agency for people with disabilities)
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights
Alabama Arise
Alabama Applesed Center for Law & Justice, Inc.
All Congregations Together
AmericaSpeaks
Back Bay Mission (Biloxi, MS)
Boat People SOS
Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana
Florida Legal Services Inc.
Katrina Clinic, Loyola Law School New Orleans
Katrina Rebirth Promiseland Company
The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Louisiana Justice Institute
Lower 9th Ward Village
Mississippi Center for Justice
Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities

The National Housing Law Project
National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc.
New Orleans Legal Assistance
Oxfam America
PolicyLink
The Probono Project
Renaissance Village Leadership Team
Steps Coalition
Turkey Creek Community Initiatives
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
UNITY of Greater New Orleans