



November 9, 2021

The Honorable Sherrod Brown  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Toomey  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Toomey:

The Bipartisan Policy Center convened a [Disaster Response Reform Task Force](#) to identify barriers to providing critical aid to communities in crisis and develop actionable policy recommendations. As a group of emergency management experts with diverse experiences from prior roles across government, we urge the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs to hold a hearing on a critical issue—reforming and codifying HUD’s Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery program.

CDBG-DR has awarded nearly \$90 billion in long-term disaster recovery funding since its first use in 1993—and almost \$40 billion in just the past four years. Yet HUD officials, grantees, and other stakeholders have all voiced concerns that these dollars do not flow quickly, equitably, or impactfully enough. Program deficiencies have stunted disaster recoveries—disrupting the lives of the low-income families and underserved communities that the program was designed to help.

Because CDBG-DR is not permanently authorized, program funding is only triggered via administration request or congressional initiative, causing substantial delays as well as a lack of certainty and predictability among impacted communities. A potential Senate Banking Committee hearing could investigate proposals to permanently authorize the program. It could also explore pain points for the CDBG-DR program and [fundamental reform priorities](#)—for example, to reduce friction between federal and local entities, improve pre-disaster planning and mitigation, and promote more equitable disaster recoveries.

A closer examination of the CDBG-DR program is especially timely. The Continuing Resolution signed by President Biden on September 30 included the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2022, which provided \$5 billion in funding for CDBG-DR. This is the first CDBG-DR appropriation in more than two years; therefore, the funding will be directed toward major declared disasters that occurred in both 2020 and 2021. Given the lag between previous disasters and this appropriation, Congress also directed HUD to quickly allocate—no later than October 30, 2021—at least \$1.6 billion of that amount to areas where major disasters that occurred last year. HUD subsequently announced the allocation of more than \$2 billion in funds would be made to 10 states covering 15 separate major disasters in 2020.



Relatedly, the bipartisan [Reforming Disaster Recovery Act](#) (H.R. 4707/S. 2471), which would permanently authorize CDBG-DR, was also included in the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriation bill for FY 2022, [recently released](#) by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

With devastating natural disasters sure to become more destructive, ensuring federal disaster recovery dollars are efficiently and strategically allocated should be a top priority for legislators from both parties. CDBG-DR's deficiencies need to be highlighted by members of Congress as a first step toward meaningful reform.

We believe a Senate Banking Committee hearing focused solely on the CDBG-DR program and its future can help grow visibility around critical reform needs and explore how the federal government can further support efficient, effective, and equitable disaster recoveries. Members of both parties in Congress and the Biden administration can find common ground in implementing reforms to enhance the impact of federal disaster response dollars. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

BPC's Disaster Response Reform Task Force

- Haley Barbour – Founding Partner, BGR Group; Former Mississippi Governor
- Thomas P. Bossert – President, Trinity Cyber; Former U.S. Homeland Security Advisor
- Xavier de Souza Briggs – Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; Former OMB Associate Director and HUD Policy Adviser
- Jeffrey Byard – Vice President of Operations, Team Rubicon; Former FEMA Associate Administrator
- Fernando Gil-Enseñat, Esq. – Principal, FGE LLC; Former Puerto Rico Secretary of Housing
- Stan Gimont – Senior Advisor for Community Recovery, Hagerty Consulting; Former HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary
- Bryan Koon – Vice President of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, IEM; Former Florida Director of Emergency Management
- Marion Mollegen McFadden – Senior Vice President of Public Policy and Senior Advisor, Resilience, Enterprise Community Partners; Former HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary
- Ben Metcalf – Managing Director, Turner Center, University of California-Berkeley; Former Director, California Department of Housing and Community Development
- Pamela Hughes Patenaude – Board Member, BPC; Former HUD Deputy Secretary
- Neal Rackleff – Attorney at Law, Rackleff LLP; Former HUD Assistant Secretary
- James Rubin – Chairman of Advisory Board, Aligned Climate Capital; Former Director, New York Governor's Office of Storm Recovery