

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
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OF
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
OVERSIGHT HEARING

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Chairwoman Murray, Vice Chair Collins, and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today to discuss disaster recovery alongside my colleagues.

In the last month, the Biden-Harris Administration has provided robust and well-coordinated Federal support for the ongoing response and recovery efforts. During my recent visit to Asheville, North Carolina, I met with local leaders, hurricane survivors, and small business owners and heard firsthand how Hurricane Helene impacted the community and what the most pressing needs were for them. Similarly, I visited Fort Myers, Florida after Hurricane Ian. I saw the damage there and heard from the people what they needed from their federal government. I visited Maui after the wildfires and Mayfield, Kentucky after the tornadoes. Time and again, I heard the same message: we cannot fully and truly recover without our national partners.

Americans have witnessed an unprecedented rise in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters in more recent years—whether it be wildfires across the West, tornadoes ravaging entire communities, floods in every corner of the country, and severe storms such as Hurricanes Helene and Milton that left trails of destruction across the Southeast and Appalachia. When these disasters occur, the federal family shows up to meet the needs of businesses, communities, and individual households impacted by disasters.

When the country faced previous natural disasters, including Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, Congress responded on a bipartisan basis to support the communities facing devastating crises. Just as Congress acted then, it is our sworn duty now to deliver the necessary resources to ensure that everyone in communities reeling from Hurricanes Helene and Milton—and those still recovering from previous disasters—have the Federal resources they need and deserve.

The last time Congress passed a comprehensive disaster package was in December 2022 as part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023*. The Administration urges Congress to act with all appropriate speed to provide more funding for communities to rebuild housing infrastructure, to support farmers and ranchers with crop losses, to address impacted schools, and to repair damaged highways. Our current request includes approximately \$12 billion for the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program to address disaster relief, long-term recovery, restoration of housing and infrastructure, economic revitalization and mitigation in the most impacted and distressed areas resulting from major disasters occurring in 2023 and 2024, including Hurricanes Helene and Milton and related storms.

HUD’s CDBG-DR Program offers flexible support for state, local, tribal, or territorial governments to address unmet recovery needs that remain after insurance and other Federal agency disaster assistance. It provides mitigation assistance as well to reduce losses from future disasters. With the support of CDBG-DR program funds, communities across America can build the foundation for recovery from extreme weather events by:

- Building back homes with resilience so homeowners and renters can return quickly and with the confidence that their homes are more protected from the next storm;
- Supporting local businesses to rebuild facilities, increasing workforce training opportunities for residents to access quality jobs and drive local economies;
- Rebuilding essential community buildings such as schools, hospitals, and fire stations; and
- Enhancing the resilience of housing-related infrastructure, by focusing on renewable energy sources, efficient water and sewer systems, and other mitigation measures to reduce future disaster risks.

For more than 30 years, Congress has appropriated supplemental emergency funding for the CDBG-DR on an ad hoc basis. Permanent authorization of CDBG-DR would improve the transparency and predictability of CDBG-DR funds made available to impacted communities. Under current practice, on average, funding is delayed for two years after the disaster. The lack of permanent authorization of the CDBG-DR Program requires HUD to establish new requirements via Federal Register notice for each supplemental appropriation, which slows down the recovery. Permanent authorization of CDBG-DR would allow HUD to promulgate rules that establish the standard requirements for all CDBG-DR grants going forward. This would remove the risks of tracking multiple Federal Register notices, which can create complexity and challenges for grantees, especially for those with lower capacity.

HUD has sought and received feedback from the public via two requests for information (RFIs) to help inform permanent authorization. Further, HUD OIG has noted in its reports that permanently authorizing the CDBG-DR Program would improve the transparency and predictability of CDBG-DR funds for impacted communities. Permanent authorization of CDBG-DR that is consistent with the guiding principles included in the 2025 President's Budget would allow HUD to better fulfill its mission to build strong, sustainable, inclusive communities.

Chairman Murray, Vice Chair Collins, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss CDBG-DR program in the context of the broader disaster response efforts. We must stand with these communities through their long road of recovery.

I look forward to working with you on the disaster supplemental request for and permanent authorization of the CDBG-DR Program.