

December 17, 2012

Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives:

In the coming days, as you consider the \$60 billion package proposed by President Obama for Superstorm Sandy relief, the undersigned community, civil rights, and housing organizations and others from New York and New Jersey and national allies urge you to make decisions that ensure that everyone impacted by the storm is included in rebuilding.

We believe there is an urgent need for passage of comprehensive appropriations and tax bills that address the full rebuilding of storm impacted communities – not piecemeal recovery. Communities, especially lower-income communities, need the ability to plan for comprehensive recovery and stable resources.

The recovery must include everyone impacted. From the Rockaways to Atlantic City, Keansburg to Hempstead, many of the most impacted communities are lower-income communities and/or communities of color. We have learned from other disasters that, absent appropriate standards and safeguards, rebuilding too often excludes lower-income people and people of color. After Katrina, communities outside of New Orleans tried to block anyone displaced from moving there and \$600 million in federal CDBG funds went to building a new port in Mississippi while low- and moderate-income people were denied rebuilding funds; after Ike, Galveston initially tried to avoid rebuilding hundreds of public housing units that were damaged. We want a truly inclusive rebuilding process that learns from past disasters and includes everyone in a comprehensive plan to rebuild fairly in the right places.

We support the comprehensive recovery framework of the President's proposal, the supplemental appropriations legislation released on December 12 by the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the expected companion tax bill. We believe that, as this legislation moves quickly through Congress, ensuring fair inclusion of lower-income communities and communities of color in the rebuilding process is critical.

We offer the following comments on the most critical components of the proposal for a fair recovery:

- 1. We support adherence to basic civil rights, labor, and environmental safeguards in existing federal law.** All prior disaster relief packages have incorporated basic federal requirements related to fair housing, nondiscrimination, labor standards, and the environment. We support President Obama's and the Senate Appropriation Committee's proposed maintenance of these basic safeguards to ensure that nobody is discriminated against in the recovery process.

- 2. We support the significant expansion of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit allocation to New York and New Jersey to address the housing shortage.** A recent State of New Jersey/FEMA study found that there is an absolute shortage of 6,500 apartments in the state – and that is assuming that every single apartment in the state is occupied, including people living 50 miles or more from their prior homes. The housing stock in New York has been similarly decimated. This impacts not only on people displaced by the storm, but also other low- and moderate-income renters who are seeing decreased housing availability and increased rents. There must be a significant federal commitment to expansion of the housing supply for low- and moderate-income people through a significant commitment of Low Income Housing Tax Credits – the most proven federal tool for creating new apartments - that will allow annual production of three to four times the normal allocation for each of the next three years. These Low Income Housing Tax Credits should be structured along the same federal standards as the current program to replicate the effectiveness of that program.

We also believe that Congress should ensure the longevity of disaster housing solutions in view of the increased housing needs and tight market resulting from pressure on the existing housing stock. These issues were identified in the recent FEMA housing needs assessment. In the short term, FEMA will provide housing relief, but in past disasters these time-limited programs have not sufficed to meet the longer-term housing needs of lower-income people impacted by the storm.

- 3. We support the Community Development Block Grant funds and emphasize the need to ensure that they actually serve the needs of lower-income people.** The largest single request in President Obama's budget and in the Senate bill is for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. We support this provision as CDBG funds provide flexibility to address a wide range of community needs.

Precisely because CDBG funds are so flexible, it is important to ensure that lower-income people and people of color are fairly included. We urge that, as these funds are expended, the expenditure is done in a fair and inclusive way.

We thank you for your support for comprehensive relief, your attention to these principles, and your work to rebuild our communities after Sandy. We look forward to working together to make sure that New Jersey and New York are rebuilt in a way that works for everyone impacted.

Sincerely,

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cc: The Honorable Shaun Donovan, Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and
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