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THREE FEDERAL PROGRAMS OFFER ASSISTANCE TO EVACUEES WITHOUT RESORTING TO HOUSING THEM IN FEMA TRAILER PARKS

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Testifying before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee last month, Scott Wells who served as FEMA's federal coordinating officer in Louisiana for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita compared the cost and the effectiveness of providing housing evacuees with temporary housing in trailers or mobile homes quite unfavorably to a FEMA program that supplies direct cash assistance to those in need.

Temporary housing is not cost effective or customer oriented. It can cost up to \$90,000-\$100,000 per mobile home for a group site (total costs for site preparation, hauling and installation, and cost of home) and \$30,000-\$40,000 for a travel trailer. Families can stay in this temporary housing for up to 18 months, but then they are required to leave. If we gave them the maximum of \$26,200 [already available through FEMA's Katrina Disaster Housing Assistance Program; see the following], many of these families would have the resources to find permanent housing immediately. This would allow them to quickly get on with rebuilding their lives and afford them an immediate permanent housing solution. It also saves the U.S. taxpayer hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Three federal programs offer assistance to those in need of housing without having to put them into FEMA trailer parks. Two of the programs are administered through HUD. The third is under management by FEMA. It is the FEMA program that Scott emphasized in his Congressional testimony.

One HUD program (Program I) is directed toward persons who were displaced by public housing, voucher participants, families from other HUD-assisted programs such as Section 8 housing, and persons who were homeless before Hurricane Katrina and were directly affected by that hurricane.

The other HUD program (Program II) is directed toward persons who were living in a Katrina-impacted area, were sleeping on the street, in emergency shelters, in transitional housing or in one of three specific HUD-assisted housing programs.

Both Program I and Program II assistance is administered through local public housing authorities but is not available to anyone residing in FEMA-supplied housing such as a

trailer. Assistance in searching for suitable rental housing and cash for utility deposits are provided under both programs.

The FEMA program is intended for all homeowners and renters who were not in HUD-assisted housing prior to Hurricane Katrina and are not residing in FEMA-supplied housing.

Programs I and II provide rental assistance through a voucher system that requires no family contribution towards rent provided the rent does not exceed fair market value. The lease under both programs terminates automatically after 18 months.

FEMA's Katrina Disaster Housing Assistance Program provides an initial payment of \$2358 which is equivalent to the national fair market value for a three-month period. Afterwards, the local fair market value determines the amount of rental assistance for a maximum of 18 months. The maximum payable for this kind of assistance is \$26,200 per person or family.

For more information in plain language that compares the three programs side-by-side, contact the National Low Income Housing Coalition at www.nlihc.org.

Over the years we have learned the hard lesson that massive public housing projects simply do not work. All across the United States large blocks of these projects have been torn down in an honest and open acknowledgement that they have failed the persons and families housed there, others living nearby, the cities where they were located, and the general taxpaying public. Large FEMA trailer parks repeat those mistakes as has been documented recently in a *Washington Post* article on a trailer park in Charlotte County Florida. The FEMA cash assistance program avoids those mistakes by making it possible for evacuees to find suitable permanent housing through the private sector which for all its flaws has a much better track record for providing housing than the public sector.

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