

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 26, 2017

The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th St SW
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

As you are aware, Hurricanes Irma and Harvey caused serious damage to many parts of Florida, Texas, Louisiana, and Georgia, necessitating federal assistance for many families to get back on their feet. With Hurricane Maria's devastation in Puerto Rico, the demand for these resources will grow even greater.

We write to urge that regulations surrounding federal disaster assistance not go beyond the intent of federal law in preventing the duplication of benefits during this crucial recovery period. Such regulations are important in ensuring that individuals are not improperly double-counting assistance for the same loss, but can be misinterpreted in ways that penalize the very victims these programs were created to assist.

As you know, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) operates under guidance that disallows duplication of benefits from multiple sources that exceed the need for recovery. This guidance applies to a program Congress often uses as a tool to appropriate additional disaster assistance, the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program. Under this guidance, certain prohibitions are made for an individual's ability to receive CDBG-DR grants based upon their status with Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster assistance.

Specifically, it is concerning that victims of disasters who apply for a SBA 7(b) disaster loan and ultimately decline the loan might be treated as though they accepted the loan when Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) Disaster Grants are eventually awarded. This situation could discourage victims from applying for SBA disaster loans in hopes of receiving a CDBG disaster grant, usually only made available by Congress in the months following the disaster. Disaster assistance is often most needed in the immediate aftermath of the storm, and its rapid provision can mitigate larger future costs if left untreated.

In keeping with the intent of duplication of benefits rules, we urge that HUD's guidance not penalize disaster victims who apply for SBA assistance but do not ultimately accept this assistance. Such a policy would be an important first step towards simplifying disaster assistance for victims of natural disaster like the hurricanes that have recently hit Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



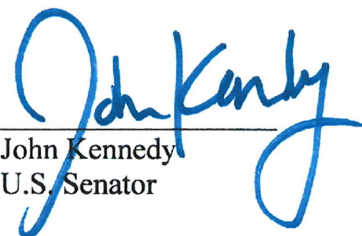
Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



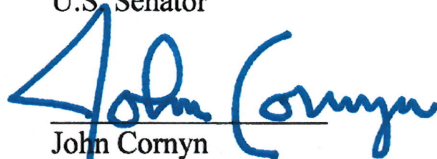
Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator



Dr. Bill Cassidy
U.S. Senator



John Kennedy
U.S. Senator



John Cornyn
U.S. Senator