

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 24, 2002

The Honorable Joe Allbaugh
Director, Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Director Allbaugh,

We would like to thank you for your response to our letters of May 22, 2002, July 15, 2002, and August 8, 2002, regarding the Individual Assistance (IA) programs, and especially the Mortgage and Rental Assistance (MRA) program. However, we would like to bring to your attention our additional concerns that have yet to be addressed. In previous meetings, FEMA officials indicated that the agency would use mainstream publicity to advertise to the public that it may benefit from these programs. While we understand that two ads will be placed in two major newspapers, we believe that sometime within the past year, a more concerted effort should have been made to aid those individuals who have experienced hardships because of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Therefore, we have the following suggestions:

- 1) **FEMA Publications and Materials Must Clearly Explain the Programs.** In our August 8, 2002, letter, we expressed concern over a lack of clarity in the information released by FEMA regarding MRA eligibility requirements. Although the information was meant to “clarify and inform,” poor wording resulted in “confusing and conflicting” messages. In response, FEMA states that it “revised language in a printed *but undistributed* brochure on the MRA program.” While we appreciate FEMA’s attempt to make revisions, it is unclear exactly what changes have been made or, given that the new language appears in an “undistributed brochure,” if people are seeing the revised version at all. Will you make the necessary changes in your publications to ensure that the eligibility requirements are explained more clearly?
- 2) **FEMA Must Do Broad Outreach to Inform Potential Applicants of the IA Programs.** According to “Ripple Effect,” a report issued by The Urban Justice Center, “changing guidelines for the distribution of relief and a lack of outreach to potential beneficiaries are hampering the ability of low-wage workers to access assistance. Insufficient access to, and information about, disaster-related assistance has left many potentially eligible applicants without aid.” We applaud your efforts to reach various communities with multi-lingual brochures and targeted distribution. However, the outreach is inadequate to keep up with the information that is frequently confusing and constantly changing. According to “Ripple Effect,” “60% of jobs lost after the attacks were in low-wage occupations” (The Fiscal Policy Institute, *Learning from the 90's*, September 1, 2002). To effectively reach the largest population of people who may qualify for assistance, we believe that FEMA should consider a multi-lingual campaign on subways and buses, radio ads and outreach to groups in Manhattan, and elsewhere in the New York area. Will you conduct more outreach to inform potential applicants about their possible

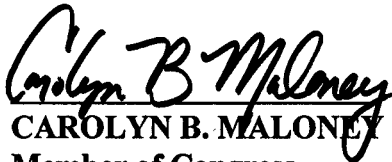
eligibility for assistance programs?

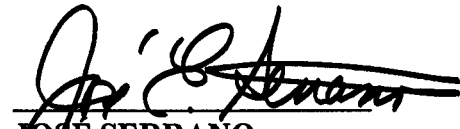
- 3) People Who Have Been Evicted Must Be Informed of Their Eligibility for Assistance. Another major concern outlined in the August 8, 2002, letter was that because of FEMA's previously restrictive regulations, many applicants who were initially denied MRA assistance may have been evicted or decided to move to less expensive homes to avoid eviction. Based on FEMA's September 24, 2002, letter, it seems that this issue has not been adequately addressed. People who have lost their homes as a result of FEMA's initial restrictions deserve more than merely a "referral" to other sources of federal assistance. FEMA should take responsibility for its earlier actions (or inactions) and extend assistance to all persons that would have been deemed eligible given the new regulations.


We appreciate all that FEMA has done in the past year to assist New York City with its recovery from the terrorist attacks. You have made great strides in improving this program. However, we believe that these issues still must be addressed. Too many individuals who are eligible for assistance have not applied for this aid for the simple reasons that they do not know that it is available or how to apply. We have included a copy of "Ripple Effect" from The Urban Justice Center for you, which outlines the effects of the terrorist attacks on low-income communities. We respectfully request that you take the appropriate steps to ensure that more people obtain the help that they need.

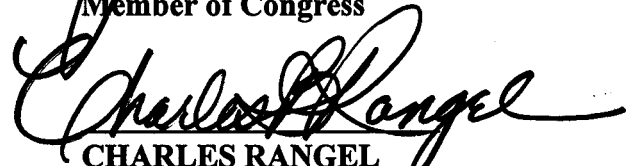
Thank you for your attention in this matter.

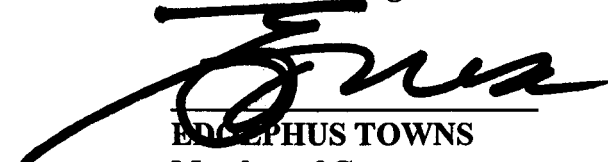
Sincerely,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress


JOSE SERRANO
Member of Congress


MAJOR OWENS
Member of Congress


CHARLES RANGEL
Member of Congress


EDOLPHUS TOWNS
Member of Congress


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