

STATEMENT OF  
JAMES N. RUSSO  
FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER FOR MISSISSIPPI  
RECOVERY OPERATIONS  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE THE  
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE  
FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
JANUARY 14, 2006

GOOD MORNING CHAIRMAN NEY, RANKING MEMBER WATERS, AND  
SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS.

I AM JAMES N. RUSSO, THE FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER FOR MISSISSIPPI  
RECOVERY OPERATIONS. IT IS AN HONOR TO APPEAR BEFORE THIS  
SUBCOMMITTEE TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE OF FEMA'S ROLE IN THE JOINT EFFORT  
TO MEET THE EMERGENCY HOUSING NEEDS OF MISSISSIPPI RESIDENTS  
AFFECTED BY HURRICANE KATRINA. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY  
TO PRESENT AN OVERVIEW OF OUR CURRENT SHORT- AND LONG-TERM  
HOUSING PLANS FOR MISSISSIPPI. THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
APPRECIATES YOUR INTEREST IN THE HOUSING CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY  
THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THIS UNPRECEDENTED DISASTER. WE ALSO  
APPRECIATE THE RESOURCES CONGRESS HAS PROVIDED TO HELP US TACKLE  
THESE CHALLENGES AND ACCOMPLISH OUR MISSION.

WITHOUT QUESTION, HURRICANE KATRINA'S UNPRECEDENTED IMPACT ON  
COMMUNITIES IN MISSISSIPPI HAS CALLED FOR EQUALLY UNPRECEDENTED  
MEASURES FROM FEMA TO MEET THE HOUSING NEEDS OF THOSE DISPLACED BY  
THE STORM.

HURRICANE KATRINA HAS THOROUGHLY TESTED THE CAPABILITIES OF FEMA,  
THE DEPARTMENT, AND THE NATION, INCLUDING MANY STATES AND  
COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE WHO ARE STILL HOSTS TO DISPLACED AMERICANS

FROM THE GULF REGION. WHILE THESE EVENTS HAVE TESTED OUR PLANS AND PROCESSES AS NEVER BEFORE, FEMA'S SHELTERING AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS HAVE HELPED THOUSANDS OF MISSISSIPPIANS SECURE INTERIM ACCOMMODATIONS, AND WE CONTINUE TO CARRY OUT AN AGGRESSIVE STRATEGY TO TRANSITION THOSE INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES INTO LONGER-TERM HOUSING SOLUTIONS.

### **EMERGENCY HOUSING**

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE STORM, INITIAL DAMAGE ESTIMATES DERIVED FROM PREDICTIVE MODELING, ON-SITE SURVEYS, AND TELEPHONE REGISTRATIONS PROJECTED A TOTAL OF 45,000 FAMILY REQUESTS FOR EMERGENCY HOUSING. THIS FIGURE REPRESENTS APPROXIMATELY 120,000 MISSISSIPPIANS. THE MAJORITY OF THESE RESIDENTS ARE IN THE SIX SOUTHERN-MOST COUNTIES IN MISSISSIPPI AND, IN PARTICULAR, AREAS SOUTH OF INTERSTATE 10 IN JACKSON, HARRISON, AND HANCOCK COUNTIES. IN AN EFFORT TO TRIAGE THE ENORMOUS NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE, AND MEET THE NEEDS OF THOSE MOST VULNERABLE, APPLICANTS REQUIRING EMERGENCY HOUSING WERE PRIORITIZED AS FOLLOWS:

1. PEOPLE IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS
2. EMERGENCY WORKERS, ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL, AND PEOPLE LIVING IN SUBSTANTIALLY DAMAGED DWELLINGS
3. PEOPLE BEING ASSISTED BY VOLUNTEER AGENCIES AND LIVING IN PLACES SUCH AS HOTELS.

4. PEOPLE WITHOUT INSURANCE BEING SHELTERED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS.
5. PEOPLE WITH INSURANCE STAYING IN HOTELS, WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS BEYOND A REASONABLE COMMUTING DISTANCE.

FEMA OFFERS TWO FORMS OF INTERIM HOUSING ASSISTANCE; RENTAL ASSISTANCE IN THE FORM OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PAID DIRECTLY TO ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS, AND DIRECT HOUSING ASSISTANCE, PRIMARILY IN THE FORM OF MANUFACTURED HOUSING UNITS PROVIDED RENT-FREE BY FEMA FOR UP TO 18 MONTHS. IN MISSISSIPPI, FEMA'S EMERGENCY SHELTERING AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS HAVE PROVIDED DISPLACED RESIDENTS WITH SECURE INTERIM ACCOMMODATIONS AS QUICKLY AS THEY COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE.

INTERIM ACCOMMODATIONS INCLUDE TRAVEL TRAILERS, MOBILE HOMES, HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS, AND A 1,600-PASSENGER CRUISE SHIP. TENTS HAVE BEEN PROVIDED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR DISTRIBUTION TO CITIZENS, WHO WISHED TO REMAIN ON THEIR PROPERTY FOR SECURITY OR REBUILDING PURPOSES. WHILE FEMA DOES UTILIZE TENTS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS, WE DO NOT BELIEVE IT IS A LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO THE HOUSING NEEDS OF MISSISSIPPIANS.

TWO PRIVATE CONTRACTORS WERE HIRED TO INSTALL TRAVEL TRAILERS AND MOBILE HOMES THROUGHOUT MISSISSIPPI TO MEET THE MAJORITY OF THE

TEMPORARY HOUSING NEED. BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 11, 2005, ONLY 13 DAYS AFTER THE STORM, FEMA BEGAN RELOCATING FAMILIES INTO THESE TEMPORARY HOUSING UNITS ON BOTH PRIVATELY OWNED AND COMMERCIAL SITES.

AS OF JANUARY 10, 2006, MORE THAN 31,000 TRAVEL TRAILERS AND 400 MOBILE HOMES ARE OCCUPIED THROUGHOUT MISSISSIPPI BY OVER 85,000 PEOPLE. 85 PERCENT OF THESE UNITS ARE ON PRIVATE SITES, AS HOMEOWNERS PREFER TO BE NEAR THEIR HOMES DURING RECONSTRUCTION. THE REMAINING UNITS ARE LOCATED ON EITHER COMMERCIAL SITES OR 44 FEMA-DEVELOPED GROUP SITES.

CURRENTLY, ROUGHLY 700 APPLICANTS ARE TEMPORARILY HOUSED ON A CRUISE SHIP IN PASCAGOULA HARBOR. THE STRATEGIC OUTREACH PLAN OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND SHELTER TRANSITION STRIKE TEAMS HAS DECREASED THIS FIGURE SUBSTANTIALLY FROM ITS PEAK OF MORE THAN 1,500 PEOPLE. THIRTY-TWO STRIKE TEAM MEMBERS HAVE BEEN WORKING THROUGHOUT MISSISSIPPI, CONTACTING DISPLACED INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES TO ASSIST THEM IN DEVISING LONG-TERM HOUSING PLANS. THE STRIKE TEAMS HAVE ALSO WORKED WITH APPLICANTS PARTICIPATING IN THE TEMPORARY HOTEL/MOTEL LODGING PROGRAM AS THEY TRANSITION TO LONG-TERM HOUSING OPTIONS. COUNSELORS ARE ADDRESSING SPECIAL

NEEDS, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS WITH APPLICANTS.

WE ESTIMATE THAT BY THE CONCLUSION OF THE PROGRAM, ABOUT 105,000 MISSISSIPPIANS WILL HAVE BEEN PROVIDED EMERGENCY SHELTERING IN 35,000 TRAVEL TRAILERS AND 4,000 MOBILE HOMES.

**INDIVIDUALS & HOUSEHOLDS PROGRAM**

THE INDIVIDUALS & HOUSEHOLDS PROGRAM (IHP), AUTHORIZED UNDER SECTION 408 OF THE STAFFORD ACT, PROVIDES RENTAL ASSISTANCE, HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE, HOME REPLACEMENT ASSISTANCE, DIRECT HOUSING, AND OTHER NEEDS ASSISTANCE TO MEET NECESSARY EXPENSES AND SERIOUS NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE DISASTER VICTIMS. IN THE FOUR MONTHS SINCE THE HURRICANE, MORE THAN 420,000 MISSISSIPPIANS HAVE REGISTERED FOR ASSISTANCE BY GOING ON-LINE OR CALLING A TOLL FREE NUMBER, 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. MORE THAN 250,000 HOUSEHOLDS HAVE BEEN APPROVED FOR SOME FORM OF HOUSING ASSISTANCE.

TO DATE, APPROXIMATELY \$237 MILLION HAS BEEN APPROVED IN RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR OVER 120,000 HOUSEHOLDS TO AID THOSE WHOSE HOMES ARE UNINHABITABLE AND WHOSE RENT IS NOT COVERED BY INSURANCE. RENTAL AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE MAY ALSO BE PROVIDED BY FEMA FOR ELIGIBLE EVACUEES OF MISSISSIPPI WHO WILL TRANSITION OUT OF THE SHORT-TERM HOTEL/MOTEL LODGING PROGRAM IN FEBUARY. OVERALL, FEMA HAS

PROVIDED \$1 BILLION TO MISSISSIPPI RESIDENTS THROUGH THE INDIVIDUALS AND HOUSEHOLDS PROGRAM.

AN INDIVIDUAL OR HOUSEHOLD DETERMINED NOT TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR FEMA ASSISTANCE IS REFERRED TO OTHER SOURCES OF POTENTIAL ASSISTANCE. ONE SUCH PROGRAM IS THE KATRINA DISASTER HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (KDHAP) OFFERED THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, OR HUD.

#### **HOUSING CHALLENGES**

MANY CHALLENGES REMAIN TO PROVIDING HOUSING TO THOSE DISPLACED BY THE HURRICANES. MANY AREAS IN MISSISSIPPI ARE STILL WITHOUT WORKING UTILITIES MAKING THE INSTALLATION OF TRAVEL TRAILERS AND MOBILE HOMES ON PRIVATE SITES DIFFICULT. THEREFORE, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE BEING ASKED TO APPROVE ADDITIONAL EMERGENCY GROUP SITE LOCATIONS. THERE HAVE SOME OBSTACLES TO THE CREATION OF GROUP SITES, SUCH AS RESOLVING ENVIRONMENTAL AND ZONING ISSUES. WE UNDERSTAND THOSE CONCERNS AND ARE WORKING WITH STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS TO OVERCOME THEM. OTHER CONCERNS INCLUDE HOW COMMUNITIES WILL ADDRESS THE HOUSING NEEDS OF THOSE DISPLACED RESIDENTS CURRENTLY IN OTHER FORMS OF TEMPORARY HOUSING. IN ADDITION, THE RELOCATION OF VICTIMS OF THE HURRICANE IN LOUISIANA WHO WISH TO MOVE IN WITH RELATIVES WHO RESIDE IN MISSISSIPPI HAS BECOME A GROWING ISSUE.

AS OF THE FIRST OF THIS YEAR, FEMA HAS SPENT NEARLY \$750 MILLION IN HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR MISSISSIPPIANS DISPLACED BY KATRINA. AS THE RELENTLESS RECOVERY PHASE CONTINUES, SO TOO DOES OUR COMMITMENT AND RESOLVE TO THOSE AFFECTED BY THE DISASTER. WE REMAIN COMMITTED TO HELPING THE STATES AND COMMUNITIES WHO ARE HELPING HOUSE AND CARE FOR THEIR NEIGHBORS AFFECTED BY THE DISASTER DURING THIS TIME. AT THE SAME TIME, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK AND DEVELOP ALTERNATIVE HOUSING SOLUTIONS IN THE DAMAGED AREAS, TO GIVE DISPLACED VICTIMS THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN HOME, AS FAST AS POSSIBLE.

I WOULD LIKE TO BRIEFLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THOSE WHO RESPONDED TO AND CONTINUE TO RESPOND TO THIS DISASTER.

I APPRECIATE THE THOUSANDS OF FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS, VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS, AND PRIVATE-SECTOR INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN RESPONDING TIRELESSLY TO HELP THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, I SALUTE THE PEOPLE OF MISSISSIPPI, SPECIFICALLY THE THOUSANDS WHO HAVE SURVIVED KATRINA'S WRATH AND HAVE SHOWN NOT ONLY COURAGE AND RESILIENCE, BUT ALSO INCREDIBLE PATIENCE AND REMARKABLE GOOD WILL. THEY ARE THE REASON WE ARE HERE TODAY.

THANK YOU. I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.

