



The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
The Department of Homeland Security
310 7th street, SW
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20410

February 26, 2010

Dear Mr. President, Secretary Napolitano and Secretary Donovan,

On behalf of the Equity and Inclusion Campaign (E&I), a coalition of 60 organizations still engaged in Gulf Coast recovery nearly five years after the landfall of Hurricane Katrina, we would like to express both appreciation and some concern in the recent release of the draft National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF), a document that does an excellent job of incorporating many of this coalition's recommendations and feedback, but lacks the protection or strength of legal standing as well as the many details related to actual implementation of the framework.

This Administration is to be recognized and celebrated, for it has made great strides in addressing some of the challenges for people in areas still impacted by the devastating hurricanes of 2005 and 2008, especially in the area of strong inter-agency coordination. The NDRF is also to be recognized for its strengths, particularly in recognition of the need for a Federal Recovery Coordinator (FRC) during disasters of scale, recognition of the role of the non-profit sector, the need for wrap-around services including case-management, access to mental health services and special consideration for people with accessibility and functional needs and other vulnerable populations, as well as environmental considerations essential for disaster mitigation. The NDRF is also to be commended for its articulation of the role of Recovery Support Functions (RSFs) in coordination of a high and sudden influx of federal resources and personnel. As a broad framework, the NDRF is a welcome and robust document; inclusion of detailed information would give its intended audience a sense of how and when such plans would be operationalized, particularly in the areas of FRC and RSF roles, responsibilities and authority.

However, if none of the great progress of this Administration is encoded into law such that Americans are afforded legal protections in the event of catastrophic disasters, then projects such as the National Disaster Recovery Working Group are for naught. For example, if the activation and requisite authority of the FRC is not legally obligatory, if RSF coordinators with management oversight within primary agencies are not legally obligated to do so, then execution of the mission of the RSF's is dangerously compromised and communities everywhere remain vulnerable not only to disaster but to an inadequate and uncoordinated federal response.

E&I is aware that the NDRF is just one component of the Long Term Disaster Recovery Group's (LTDRG) recommendations, and that a second report is forthcoming which will be submitted to President Obama. We welcome the LTDRG's secondary report and look forward to partnering with the Administration in continuing to develop the details and operational plans, with hopes that legislative recommendations and changes will be offered and implemented.

We as a nation are approaching the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. In many ways we are not in a stronger position in terms of legal protections and operational response or recovery plans than we were five years ago. However, the LTDRG creates an important opportunity to make significant changes, including addressing the lack of a sufficient national disaster housing strategy in place, as required by law in the 2006 Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA); inter-agency coordination and commitment by the federal government to protect communities during catastrophic disaster and as a matter of national security; storm protection via our wetlands and barrier islands across the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama; and disaster healthcare response plans and priorities.

It is in that spirit in which the Equity and Inclusion Campaign welcomes the Obama Administration's Disaster Recovery Working Group's process, and are committed to working with the Administration to provide on-going and continued support in developing the details necessary for the plan's implementation, as well as together making the work of the Long Term Disaster Recovery Working Group a legal framework through which our nation responds to disaster. It is time for this Administration to capture the work it has accomplished and preserve it for generations to come.

We respectfully request that Secretaries Napolitano and Donovan, as coordinators of the Working Group, work to find solutions to give legal and adequate standing to the recommendations put forward in the National Disaster Recovery Framework, as well as work with staff to develop the details necessary to move the framework from document to operational plan.

Sincerest Regards,

The Equity and Inclusion Campaign

ADDENDUM I: National Disaster Recovery Framework specific response and recommendations

The National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) draft is an important document that presents a welcome opportunity to encode much of the stakeholder feedback the Obama Administration has received into law.

In particular, the Equity and Inclusion Campaign welcomes portions of the NDRF which capture recommendations put forward by 60 organizations participating in three Equity and Inclusion Campaign convenings, the last of which included members of the Obama Administration on January 7th, 2010 in New Orleans. These provisions are listed below with follow-on questions.

I. Section VII of the NDRF describes the function and purpose of a Federal Recovery Coordinator

A Federal Recovery Coordinator plays an essential role in facilitation of federal assistance coordination and collaboration with local, state and tribal governments, and captures Equity and Inclusion Campaign participant recommendations for increased and consistent coordination among federal agency and local partners. The responsibilities included in the NDRF as proposed for the Federal Recovery Coordinator are consistent with Equity and Inclusion Campaign recommendations and values.

Details missing from the NDRF as to implementation of the Federal Recovery Coordinator include:

- What measures or parameters of disaster trigger the assignment of a Federal Recovery Coordinator?
- Where is the Federal Recovery Coordinator located, and what authority will the position have over multiple and collaborating federal agencies?
- What authority will the Federal Recovery Coordinator have to carry out duties as described, including facilitation of federal funding streams and solutions to assistance gaps and overlaps?
- What authority and specific mandate will the Federal Recovery Coordinator have to promote inclusiveness and participation in recovery?
- How will the position, roles and responsibilities of the Federal Recovery Coordinator become incorporated into federal law such that disaster impacted communities are guaranteed the benefits and necessary coordination of federal resources and agencies associated with this position?

II. Section VIII of the NDRF describes the function and purpose of Recovery Support Functions

The Recovery Support Functions section of the NDRF creates an operational plan for essential coordination of federal agencies, as recommended by the Equity and Inclusion Campaign based on post-disaster recovery experiences. Further, the Recovery Support Function mandate and timeline are to be commended for coordination with and complementary functions to the Emergency Support Functions. In particular, the NDRF is to be commended for its coordination of simultaneous emergency response and long-term recovery strategy and support. Proposed coordinating agencies in each of the six function areas reporting to the Federal Recovery

Coordinator are holistic in addressing the full spectrum of simultaneous needs emerging post-disaster and necessary for a full and equitable recovery.

Details missing from the NDRF as to implementation of the Recovery Support Functions include:

- What authority will proposed coordinating agencies have over other primary agencies in the implementation of the function's mission?
- When will proposed coordinating agencies be permanently assigned, particularly in the function areas of Community Planning and Capacity Building and Infrastructure Systems?
- Equity and Inclusion Campaign welcomes the spirit and intent of each of the Recovery Support Functions, including Community Planning and Capacity Building, Economic Development, Health, Social & Community Services, Housing, Infrastructure Systems and Natural and Cultural Resources. However, it is unclear from the NDRF when and how the spirit and intent of this document will translate to clear guidelines for implementation.
- How will the position, roles and responsibilities of the Recovery Support Functions become incorporated into federal law such that disaster impacted communities are guaranteed the benefits and necessary coordination of federal resources and agencies associated with this organization?

Pursuant to sections 402, 403 and 502 of the Stafford Act be it recommended that language including "The President may-" be amended to "The President shall-", in order to bolster the strength of the NDRF and its requisite recommendations for managing long term disaster recovery in such a way that streamlines federal efforts and advances local and/or regional social and economic interests during the recovery process.

III. Additional recommendations related to long-term disaster recovery

While the Community Considerations section of the NDRF strengthen the framework's commitment to accessibility and wrap-around services necessary to a full recovery, it is further recommended that the Obama Administration work with Congress to amend the Stafford Act to

- 1) Ensure that recommendations put forth by the NDRF are afforded the force of federal law
- 2) Ensure adequate and accessible housing during both short term disaster response and long term disaster recovery vis-à-vis Sections 403 and 408 of the Act, as put forth by the Senate Disaster Subcommittee in its February 2009 report, *Far From Home*.