



One Hundred Twelfth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

May 12, 2011

Mr. W. Craig Fugate
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Fugate:

In March 2011, approximately 5,000 letters detailing the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) intention to recoup funds were mailed. This recoupment procedure is designed to recover non-fraud based overpayments received by individuals who were affected by disasters in prior years¹.

I appreciate FEMA's willingness to work with my office to assure that the recoupment procedure would be fair, transparent and permit consideration of on-going economic hardship in the Gulf Region. I know that we have been able to work on many issues because you share my belief that FEMA must not only be able to respond to disasters but must also be responsive and responsible.

However, despite this collaborative effort, none of us could have foreseen the extensive damage caused by tornados this spring. The path of destruction left in the wake of these storms has slashed through many communities and left individuals reeling. While the storms have already caused loss of life and property, in many instances these losses will be compounded by flooding.

As you know, many of the communities currently affected by these severe weather conditions were also affected in past years. In Mississippi alone, a review of the counties involved in the current disaster declarations cross referenced with the addresses of individuals who have received recoupment demand letters reveals that thirty-four individuals owe a total of \$174,895.07. While I would not want to speculate, I would estimate that a review involving other districts would likely reveal similar results.

¹ *Management Advisory Report: Recoupment of Improper Disaster Assistance Payments, OIG-11-21, December, 2010.*

While I understand the need to recoup overpayments, I write to encourage you to consider additional steps which may assist those who are in the recoupment process. For instance, it is my understanding that the current rolling deadline to seek an appeal of a recoupment demand is scheduled to begin on May 16, 2011. An extension of the deadline for those people who reside in areas currently under a disaster declaration designation would provide a strong expression of compassion. Moreover, because agency representatives have indicated that individuals who received overpayments from assistance provided during Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma have not yet received recoupment demand letters, I would suggest that FEMA postpone those notifications. Many of these individuals are among those facing evacuation from current Mississippi River flooding.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions. If you should have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact, Ms. Cherri Branson, Chief Counsel for Oversight at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member