

Bob Riley
GOVERNOR



Bill Johnson
DIRECTOR

State of Alabama

April 17, 2009

The Honorable Maxine Waters, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity
Committee on Financial Services
U.S. House of Representatives
2344 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Waters:

On behalf of the State of Alabama and Governor Bob Riley, I would like to express continued appreciation to Congress and the Administration for providing disaster assistance to Gulf Coast states in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and other destructive storms. I, also, want to thank you for providing the State an opportunity to testify last May at the hearing on Emergency CDBG Funds in the Gulf Coast.

Your consideration and the resulting federal assistance allowed the State to accomplish much through rebuilding and recovery efforts. There are signs of vigor in the community of Bayou La Batre—an area hard hit by Hurricane Katrina. A newly formed neighborhood, "Safe Harbor," is providing just that—a family-friendly, safe neighborhood for 200 families who lost their homes. The housing programs in Bayou La Batre, and Mobile and Washington Counties, have brought renewed normalcy to the lives of numerous households impacted by the storms. We still have much work to do in Coden, but the new Coastal Response Center is a beacon of hope for that community. Slowly but surely, new infrastructure is replacing destruction.

I had the opportunity to revisit the storm-torn areas earlier this month. A few hours spent in the region revealed a unique combination of progress and pain. Much remains undone toward restoring the area to pre-Katrina conditions. For example, the new sewage treatment plant in Bayou La Batre is still merely a sketched rendering. The lengthy and exhaustive environmental processes have prevented advancement beyond the vision and plan to replace the destroyed plant. The affordable public housing in the City of Mobile is now in serious jeopardy. This property—the only residence some families have known for decades—remains in disrepair due to new environmental codes that preclude progress.

The tour led us through three communities, each separated by distance, but all tied together with a common thread. Multiple families clustered in storm-tattered homes.

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Residents working through wreckage while children play hide-and-seek among debris, and elderly and disabled residents struggling to negotiate the five-step climb into temporary, mobile-housing. New homes and businesses are sprinkled throughout those that still bear red 'Xs' or 'CLOSED' signs. And the only things spreading quicker than three-plus years of hopelessness and despair are the multiplying mold spores on walls—both inside and out.

Families desperately clinging to land owned for generations dwell in homes that are largely obliterated. A lean-to home here; a crudely repaired home there—all unsafe, unhealthy structures sheltering mostly families with children, elderly or disabled. A poorly, multi-patched structure is home to a three-generation family of 13 members. The four or five separate families now rejoined due to loss of individual homes during the storm. While adults shared concerns with us, small children ran in the rubble.

Affordable housing continues to be among the most significant and urgent needs in the Gulf Coast. As the State works to address these critical needs through available housing funds, an alarming scenario surfaces. In our estimation, the remaining housing funds will only assist an additional 136 homes. This will leave Mobile County with 542 documented households on the waiting list, requiring an additional \$42 million in assistance.

Not included in this estimation are another 359 households that qualify for assistance, but who missed the application deadline. Among the over-350 currently undocumented homes, 285 in Bayou La Batre and Mobile County necessitate elevation to meet new requirements. This stipulation for undocumented homes produces an added need of approximately \$54 million. Combining the documented and undocumented needs, the State estimates an additional \$100 million is required to adequately address our disaster housing needs. This is the same need I identified before your hearing last May.

On behalf of Governor Bob Riley, I again want to thank you and the Subcommittee for giving the State of Alabama an opportunity to present an update on our progress and needs—both in May 2008 and today. By way of this letter, I would like to appeal to you and the Subcommittee to consider additional assistance. Your support will provide adequate housing for citizens from whom Hurricane Katrina took one of the most basic human needs—shelter in a safe and healthy home.

Sincerely,



Bill Johnson
Director