

Office of Community Development

Disaster Recovery Unit

State of Louisiana

Division of Administration

JOHN BEL EDWARDS  
GOVERNOR



JAY DARDENNE  
COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION

August 16, 2018

Mr. Stanley Gimont  
Director  
Office of Block Grant Assistance  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W., Room 7178  
Washington, D.C. 20410-7000

RE: 2016 Flood CDBG Allocation  
Waiver Request for Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing

Dear Mr. Gimont:

The State of Louisiana is requesting a waiver of 42 U.S.C. 5305(a) in order to provide tenant-based rental assistance to households impacted by disasters eligible under the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2017, the Further Continuing and Security Assistance Appropriations Act, 2017 and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 to the extent necessary, to make eligible rental assistance and utility payments paid for up to 2 years on behalf of homeless and at-risk households when such assistance or payments are part of a homeless prevention or rapid rehousing program or activity. While existing CDBG regulations may allow payments for these purposes, grantees under the annual CDBG programs are subject to a much shorter time limitation (3 months). The beneficiaries in the Rapid Rehousing program were either directly rendered homeless as the result of the floods or as the result of loss of housing stock and shelters caused by the floods have diminished the opportunities that homeless or at risk homeless individuals had to independently establish re-housing have been diminished.

**Justification and Transition Plan:**

This waiver will assist individual and families – both those already receiving rental assistance as well as those who will receive rental assistance subsequently - to maintain stable, permanent housing and help them return to their hometowns as desired when additional permanent housing is available.

Mr. Stanley Gimont  
August 16, 2018

It will also provide additional time to stabilize individuals and families in permanent housing where rents are higher than is typical for the area and vacancy rates are extraordinarily low while damaged homes continue to be repaired.

The goal of the homeless prevention and rapid rehousing model is to minimize the time a family is homeless by providing rehousing assistance, rental assistance, and linking the family to services designed to help it become stable and self-sufficient. The state has modeled its program on the rapid rehousing program approach that HUD has endorsed as a national best practice. The state also notes that as a consequence of the Great Floods of 2016 thousands of families continue to be doubled up with family and friends, facing eviction, in temporary housing conditions, including FEMA trailers that will be removed or have rents increased in the very near future. The state works with each of the individual households in the Rapid Rehousing program to move them from the temporary assistance onto long-term permanent affordable housing solutions. The state's human services agency is currently determining which households are eligible for the LHA's Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program. This program currently has some availability (both services and housing) in certain parts of the State and expects additional housing development under this program over the next year. RRH households are provided with a priority on the waiting lists for these units.

The state created the Louisiana Housing Heroes initiative sponsored by the Governor to help identify existing rental units in March 2017. This initiative was a request to owners and property managers to let the state know of rental housing that could be made available to the Rapid Rehousing program participants. Owners and property managers responded with unit availability and some even waived applications fees, pet deposits and first month's rent. In conjunction with the Louisiana Housing Heroes the state created housing fairs. These housing fairs served as a one stop shop for the Rapid Rehousing program. At the housing fairs people were able to fill out Rapid Rehousing applications, have eligibility determined, get linked to available housing, meet owners and property managers, select a unit, have the unit inspected and sign a lease. HUD has recognized the housing fairs as a best practice. The state has been awarded the 2018 Council of State Community Development Agencies Sterling Achievement Award for Housing for the Louisiana Housing Heroes. The Louisiana Housing Heroes and housing fairs enabled the state to close the last disaster shelter, end FEMA's TSA program and help renters exit MHU's without anyone becoming homeless.

The state was recently awarded HUD-VASH vouchers and will make those available to eligible veteran households who are interested in living in Calcasieu Parish.

The state submitted an application for 150 Mainstream Vouchers to HUD in June. HUD indicated it would make awards by October. There may be households that are not eligible for the LHA's PSH program who would be eligible for these tenant-based vouchers, if awarded.

Although access to affordable housing is an effective way to ensure long-term housing stability among households experiencing homelessness, affordable housing resources currently fall far short of the need. Short-term assistance - including financial assistance, housing search assistance, and targeted services - has shown tremendous promise in resolving the immediate crisis of homelessness for many families and preventing their future returns to homelessness. Resources

Mr. Stanley Gimont  
August 16, 2018

are limited and will be used most efficiently to ensure that assistance can be provided to the greatest number of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness. The state will use an operating principle that households should receive “just enough” assistance to successfully exit homelessness and avoid returning to the streets, other places not meant for human habitation, doubled-up living situations and emergency shelters. Longer-term and more costly programs like permanent supportive housing are being reserved for those individuals and families who need this level of assistance to exit homelessness and remain housed.

Research suggests that rapid re-housing is more cost-effective than transitional housing. The long-term impacts of rapid re-housing are still being studied, but initial research indicates that people assisted by rapid re-housing experience higher rates of permanent housing placement and similar or lower rates of return to homelessness after the assistance ends compared to those assisted by transitional housing or who only receive emergency shelter. In and of itself, rapid re-housing is not designed to comprehensively address all of a recipient’s service needs or their poverty. Instead, the rapid re-housing program solves the immediate crisis of homelessness, while connecting families or individuals with appropriate community resources to address other service needs.

Case management will also, as appropriate, assist households with connecting to resources that help them improve their safety and well-being and achieve their long-term goals. This includes providing or ensuring that households have access to resources related to income and health care benefits, employment and community-based services (if needed/appropriate) so that they can sustain rent payments independently when rental assistance ends.

Other possible permanent housing options are in private market apartments, affordable or subsidized housing, or living with friends or family members. Further, the state will establish a referral process through the use of LA Housing Search, the state’s rental housing locator service, which will enable the targeted households to apply to live in the affordable housing units created under other programs. If necessary the state will host more housing fairs to link Rapid Rehousing participants to these newly created units.

As always, we appreciate the partnership and guidance provided by HUD as Louisiana continues to recover from the Great Floods of 2016. I trust that you will give the above waiver request every appropriate consideration, and know that if you need any additional information in support of this request, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Patrick W. Forbes, P.E.  
Executive Director