



EMERGENCY FOOD AND SHELTER PROGRAM

Request: Congress should oppose further funding cuts to FEMA's Emergency Food & Shelter Program, and oppose any efforts to transfer the program from FEMA to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

I. Program Overview:

After the significant economic downturn of the 1982 Recession, Congress established the EFSP program with the strong support of leading charitable organizations. It is the first federal response to **assist the newly unemployed and working poor from falling into chronic homelessness and food insecurity**. The program funds nonprofit and public shelters and other service organizations for items such as food, consumable supplies for shelters, and rental and utility assistance to households.

EFSP serves over 14,000 human service agencies in more than 2,500 counties and cities across the country, through a collaborative effort between the private and public sectors. FEMA partners with representatives of the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA, The Jewish Federations of North America, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, The Salvation Army and United Way Worldwide, in administering the program, nationally. A similar structure operates in local jurisdictions, with the national board's guidance, to ensure that those most in need are served.

The program has five basic objectives: Allocations to the neediest areas; Fast response; Public/private sector cooperation; Local decision making; and Minimal, but accountable reporting. The program places special emphasis on assisting the elderly, families with children, Native Americans and Veterans.

II. Legislative Status:

The program has been administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for 34 years, with limited agency overhead and an emphasis on local implementation with oversight from a National Board made up of leading national nonprofit organizations. Prior to the Great Recession, the program was funded at \$150 million. The funding increased to \$200 million between FY 2009-FY 2010, and then was reduced to \$120 million annually, commencing in FY 2011 and through FY 2016. For FY 2017, the Senate has proposed cutting the program funding further, to \$100 million and transferring the program to HUD.

III. Mission Alignment with FEMA

Administrator Craig Fugate (2009-2017): According to a FEMA news release dated August 24, 2014, "Congress placed the EFSP under FEMA in 1983 to **underscore the emergency nature of the funding in getting assistance to those most vulnerable with food and shelter needs.**" In this release, Fugate explained that, "the Emergency Food and Shelter Program supports communities across the nation and some of their most vulnerable residents. The program enables nonprofit partners to ensure that the most basic needs of these citizens are met." The

statement comports with FEMA's mission to take action to return families and communities to a normal or an even safer situation following an emergency. (HQ-20114-063)

IV. Emergency Response

EFSP funds are also used to assist individuals affected by disasters consistent with the parameters of the program. (Source: CRS/ RS22286) The program assisted thousands of families from several counties in North Carolina, who were displaced by Hurricane Matthew in 2016. It provided food bank services, and rental and mortgage assistance to Clark County, Washington to help respond to its affordable housing crisis in 2016. The program helped to alleviate the dispossession of families in East Baton Rouge Parish and Tangipahoa Parish after the Louisiana Flooding of 2016, and those devastated by Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina. The program also assisted communities impacted by the Flint, Michigan Water Contamination Crisis.

V. Safeguarding the EFSP

The EFSP program provides funding for emergency services to prevent people from falling into homeless and food insecurity, and is appropriately partnered with FEMA in this mission. The program does not provide for transitional or long-term solutions to homelessness, which is HUD's mission. In contemplating such a move, CRS found that transferring the program would be detrimental to the providers and communities it serves:

"[I]f the EFS program changes its focus it would also be leaving behind a program that reached out more broadly geographically and, because of that breadth, also to many smaller recipient organizations that other programs cannot reach. These types of recipient organizations, that provide basic emergency assistance, may not qualify for grant assistance under more sophisticated programs and systems devoted to long-term efforts." (Source: CRS 7-5700/R42766)

VI. National Justification

The Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program is exceptional in two major areas. First, the program is an outstanding example of the strength of public/private partnership. Governed by a board of private sector experts with public officials charged with emergency response, the very structure of the program demands that private, voluntary organizations work closely and effectively with the Federal government to disburse Federal funds where they are needed most. This program has the benefit of public monies and the efficiency and expertise of the private, voluntary sector in service delivery. Federal funds are quickly distributed to thousands of needy areas throughout the United States that are facing economic emergencies. The second positive characteristic of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program is that it has brought various agencies together at the local level to address a community's hunger and homeless problems. Many local agencies that previously had not joined resources have done so under the sponsorship of this program.

For further information, please contact Robert Goldberg at: Rob.Goldberg@JewishFederations.org

The Jewish Federations of North America represents 148 Jewish Federations and 300 Network communities, which raise and distribute more than \$2.5 billion annually for social welfare, social services and educational needs. The Federation movement, collectively among the top 10 charities on the continent, protects and enhances the well-being of Jews worldwide through the values of tikkun olam (repairing the world), tzedakah (charity and social justice) and Torah (Jewish learning)