

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2021

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Administrator Criswell:

Thank you for leading the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) efforts in response to the effects of Tropical Depression Ida that struck New York on September 1. FEMA's disaster relief programs—specifically the Individuals and Households Program (IHP)—are essential for New Yorkers in the wake of the natural disaster that claimed dozens of lives and destroyed billions of dollars of property. Yet, we write with concern that FEMA's IHP assistance has been painfully short of meeting our constituents' needs as they rebuild their lives.

As you know, Tropical Depression Ida caused enormous economic damage, and some estimate the total cost could be as high as \$95 billion for all states impacted¹; given the immense destruction the flooding caused, New York City's share of this number is certain to be high. As our City continues to rebuild, it is crucial that New Yorkers have enough funding to repair their homes and restore their possessions.

Yet, this has not been the case as many of our constituents have reached out to us about receiving low payouts from FEMA. One constituent who applied for assistance received approximately \$5,500, but their receipts and repair proposals of damages were in the range of at least \$50,000. There are other stories² like this and it is deeply concerning that families continue to struggle.

Low payouts have forced them to file more paperwork to appeal those decisions and to stretch a few thousand dollars to cover tens of thousands of dollars of damage. For Limited English Proficient communities, they have additional barriers to seeking relief. This is troubling and we seek answers to the following questions:

¹ Pippa Stevens, "Hurricane Ida's damage tally could top \$95 billion, making it 7th costliest hurricane since 2000," (CNBC, Sept. 8, 2021), <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/08/hurricane-idas-damage-tally-could-top-95-billion-making-it-7th-costliest-hurricane-since-2000-.html>.

² Ari Ephraim Feldman, "Queens Ida victims who say they've 'lost enough' now see low FEMA payouts," (NY1, Oct. 22, 2021), <https://www.nyl.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2021/10/21/queens-ida-victims-who-say-they-ve--lost-enough--now-see-low-fema-payouts>.

1. Without access to granular data on IHP registration, determination, and appeals, what programmatic policies and values are applied in determining awards? What level of damage provides larger awards or ranges of awards?
2. FEMA has 90 days to respond to an appeal. What is FEMA's average response rate in this disaster and how does this compare with prior disasters?
3. FEMA responds to appeals in English and Spanish, but this leaves out other communities who speak languages like Mandarin or Korean. Hence, those individuals must find someone or service to help process their appeals application with FEMA. What can FEMA do to help reduce this barrier and simplify the process? Could FEMA hire someone with the appropriate language skills to help with the registration process?

As we approach the holiday season, it is imperative that we work together to fix the issue of low payouts. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to address this situation.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress