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December 3, 2007

The Honorable R. David Paulison
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Paulison:

We are writing to you to urge you to stop any planned evictions of families living at trailer sites in New Orleans and other cities along the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. We are concerned that by continuing to evict families that do not have permanent housing already in place, FEMA may be contributing to the already high number of homeless families in the City of New Orleans.

Given the nature of New Orleans' housing stock following Katrina, the decision to close trailer sites is especially troubling. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the City's homeless population has more than doubled to 12,000 individuals homeless on any given night. The increase in the homeless population is directly attributable to a lack of available and affordable housing: the City has lost 67 percent of its housing stock and Fair Market Rents have risen 45 percent since the storm.

Simply put, we are not convinced that New Orleans has the rental capacity to absorb these families. Indeed, FEMA's own data seem to support this conclusion. Only 7 percent of applicants vacating trailers between August 1st and October 30th indicated that they would return to their pre-disaster rental resource. Fifteen percent indicated that they would have to perform repairs on a property in order to move.

Although 56 percent indicated that they would move to a new rental unit, we feel that it is highly unlikely that these units are in the City of New Orleans. And while families are free to move to areas with more housing opportunities, we feel that given the limited financial options available to many recovering families, a move outside the New Orleans area is not always a feasible alternative.

We agree that the recovery process must keep moving. However, given the tremendous obstacles facing the City in providing affordable housing and the increasing numbers of families joining the ranks of the City's homeless, we feel that, unless undertaken with the recommendations below, these closures are inappropriate at this time.

Therefore, we urge you to take the following action:

- 1) Approve evictions only for those families that have signed leases for new rental units, have documented a purchase of a new housing unit, or have demonstrated that they have a housing alternative to living in a trailer.
- 2) Implement a tracking program to ensure that families are adequately housed in accordance with their permanent housing plans and are not homeless.
- 3) Actively work with homeless service providers in New Orleans to determine the extent to which FEMA's actions are impacting the City's homeless population and take affirmative action to curtail park closures when the homeless population rises.

We are willing to work with you on this and other issues facing the Gulf Coast as the region transitions to a more sustainable recovery.

We thank you in advance for your prompt response to this letter.

Sincerely,



MAXINE WATERS
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Housing and
Community Opportunity



BARNEY FRANK
Chairman
Committee on Financial Services