



SARASOTA COUNTY

"Dedicated to Quality Service"

January 26, 2023

Secretary Marcia L. Fudge
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street Southwest
Washington D.C. 20410

Re: CDBG-DR Direct Allocation to Sarasota County Due to Impacts from Hurricane Ian

Dear Secretary Fudge:

This letter is to request a direct allocation of \$149 million in CDBG-DR assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Agency for Sarasota County, Florida, to address long-term recovery initiatives resulting from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ian. On September 28th, Ian's 200-mile wind field impacted Sarasota County with winds over 100 MPH. 144 deaths were attributable to Hurricane Ian in Florida – 10 of those deaths occurred in Sarasota County – second highest county death toll after Lee County. Our community experienced widespread disaster damage from over 21" of rains that occurred during Hurricane Ian.

Fortunately, Sarasota County was spared a direct hit, but the damage in the south of the County were catastrophic. Ian significantly impacted the Harbor Isles mobile home community in unincorporated Sarasota County, as well as several other similar communities within the City of North where many LMI families reside, and the massive rains flooded most of the city. It also created massive damage to the historic Venice Theatre building. And throughout the entire region, schools were closed until further notice, uprooted trees, cut off power and strewn debris was everywhere. Months after the Hurricane, devastated parts of the county were still completing clean up and several communities were without working electricity and water.

Over 58,000 households in Sarasota County reported flood damage from the storm through the FEMA Individual Assistance portal. Of those registered with FEMA, an estimated 51,350 (88.5%) households reported from zero income up to the HUD low-to-moderate income (LMI) limits. Many of these families may not have the means to make repairs to bring their homes back to pre-disaster condition and certainly do not have the financial means to make their homes more disaster resilient.

Sarasota County is an entitlement grantee that has capacity to successfully manage CDBG-DR funds if granted directly by HUD to Sarasota County. Sarasota County currently manages a portfolio of \$433 million in open grant awards to include Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG). Sarasota County has also successfully pivoted its resources and staff to meet critical disaster needs of our community, to include those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most recently the County expanded staff to successfully administer of over \$217 million in COVID related grant funds to include:

- \$75 million in CARES Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF).
 - Over \$50 million was expended to support local businesses and non-profit agencies (rent and operational expenses) and over \$7 million to support individuals (rent, utilities, and other).

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- \$84 million in ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF).
 - \$25 million was dedicated to supporting affordable housing construction and acquisition, one of the highest proportions of SLFRF funds dedicated to this effort across all counties and cities in Florida.
- \$20 million in CRRSA and ARPA Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Funds.
 - Over \$18.4 million has been expended for rental and utility assistance to support 1,137 households and additional ERA funds have been requested from the U.S. Treasury.

All of the COVID-19 pandemic funds identified above also have had a significant public awareness and community engagement functions to include: Each having its own translatable webpages with published reports and data on its programs; for the SLFRF program, public surveys and community engagements conducted on proposed uses of funds and current statuses; for the ERA program, assignment of ambassadors throughout the community and in LMI areas to provide awareness of the program, resources, and assist with submittal and approvals of applications.

Additionally, to ensure the County has the capacity to administer a direct allocation of Ian CDBG-DR funding from U.S. HUD we have also recently competitively procured the services of Tetra Tech, a nationally recognized disaster grant management and case management firm to augment the County's resources. As a result, Sarasota County has the expertise, experience, and resources to manage a direct allocation of HUD CDBG-DR funding.

To date, we have estimated an unmet financial need of over \$149 million and climbing. This includes \$124.9 million in estimated unmet housing needs and \$24 million for the local match of FEMA Public Assistance projects, as well as a growing number of mitigation projects.

- **Housing Impacts.** More than 58,000 households in Sarasota County applied for FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) following Hurricane Ian. Of those, an estimated 53,500 households or almost 92%, respectively, have received damage from Hurricane Ian and live in eligible CDBG housing. Reviewing the eligible housing units, approximately 944 of these homes experienced substantial damage with flooding over 18 inches of water and are expected to apply for CDBG-DR assistance. We also estimate that an additional 960 households with 12" to 17" of flooding will also require assistance. Over 70% of these homes reported low to moderate (LMI) income to FEMA.

Using these conservative damage estimates, Sarasota County has determined an unmet housing-related need of \$124.9 million – \$108.6 million from CDBG-DR funding plus an additional \$16.3 million (15%) for mitigation measures. Based upon the data, the County strongly believes we can easily meet CDBG-DR requirements to ensure 70 percent of the funding assists LMI households.

- **FEMA Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Grant Projects.** The County is documenting Ian's severe damage to roads, bridges, utilities, and parks and the critical mitigation measures that must be undertaken to create a resilient community. With hundreds of projects underway, we expect the unmet infrastructure needs to increase over time. The initial estimate for the local match of FEMA Public Assistance projects is \$24 million. The County is also in the process of identifying and documenting projects eligible for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

Direct Federal assistance is critical to bolster the stock of affordable housing in the area, repair and rebuild damaged homes, and repair infrastructure and community resources that support LMI neighborhoods.

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- **Housing Initiatives.** Southwest Florida had limited affordable housing prior to the storm. The depletion of available housing stock will impact the whole community. Sarasota County must find ways to increase capacity of affordable housing in the community, especially LMI neighborhoods. With direct Federal assistance, the County can support underserved populations get the assistance they need for home repairs and new housing developments. The County can assist households relocate to a new home through acquisition programs of severely damaged properties.
- **Infrastructure Initiatives.** The County's infrastructure experienced severe damage and disruptions from Hurricane Ian cutting off access to critical services for the community's most vulnerable residents. Direct Federal assistance will allow the County to prioritize disaster recovery infrastructure projects that best meet the needs of our LMI community.
- **Economic Development Initiatives.** Sarasota County is a unique community with major economic drivers in retail, hospitality, technology, construction, healthcare, and agriculture. Many people felt the economic impact from Hurricane Ian not only in damage to their homes, but also from lost wages. Direct Federal disaster recovery assistance will allow the County to prioritize and invest in economic development opportunities to help LMI households better withstand future disasters.
- **Additional Unmet Needs.** As work continues with local, state, and Federal partner agencies and residents to move forward through the disaster recovery process, the County will lead the effort to identify and document ongoing needs and implement long-term recovery plan focused on the specific needs and priorities of the community.

We respectfully request your support for the County's request for direct Federal assistance from HUD to ensure the funding is prioritized to help County residents most in need. We welcome a discussion with you or your staff to review our current financial need, our capacity to manage the program, and our plan to administer the funds.

Respectfully,



Jonathan R. Lewis, ICMA-CM
County Administrator

- c: Steven Botelho, ICMA-CM, Deputy County Administrator
Brad Johnson, ICMA-CM, Assistant County Administrator
Matthew Osterhoudt, Director, Planning and Development Services Department
Kim Radtke, Director, Office of Financial Management
Rob Lewis, Director, Governmental Relations

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