



December 12, 2018

Mr. Ben Metcalf
Director
California Department of Housing and Community Development
2020 West El Camino Avenue, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95833

Habitat for Humanity appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on California's Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Action Plan (Draft Plan) for Funds in Response to the 2017 Disasters.

Habitat for Humanity is a global nonprofit housing organization that seeks to bring people together to build homes, communities and hope. Since 1976, Habitat has served more than 600,000 families by welcoming people of all races, religions and nationalities to construct, rehabilitate or preserve homes; by advocating for fair and just housing policies; and by providing training and access to resources to help families improve their shelter conditions.

Habitat shares California's goal of achieving full housing recovery and mitigating against future disasters, and the disaster CDBG program can be an important tool for reaching that success. Disaster preparedness, response and mitigation have long been priorities for Habitat in our mission to build safe homes and resilient communities. California Habitat affiliates will support the long-term housing recovery efforts in the counties that experienced severe damage to their housing stock. Housing initiatives led by California Habitat affiliates will not only help families return to homes that are safe and secure, but will also support broader community engagement to build back stronger and expand local capacity to withstand and respond to the next disaster. In response to the draft action plan, Habitat has a few suggested comments outlined below.

Maintain the current requirement that 70% of CDBG-DR investments serve people with low and moderate incomes.

The CDBG-DR program is one of the primary tools used by the federal government to help the lowest income families in communities recover after a disaster. The CDBG-DR program specifically designates that 70% of all funding must be allocated to low and moderate income people. It is imperative that this percentage remains, and that a majority of CDBG-DR funding stays focused on repairing and rehabbing the housing of the most vulnerable populations, who will struggle the most to fix their homes because they have the least accessible resources. Any attempt to change that percentage should be examined and supported by conclusive data that illustrates why more funding should be allocated to persons that do not fit within the low and moderate income qualifications. Habitat recommends that CDBG-DR funding ensures that the recovery needs of low-income people and communities are not overlooked, and that federal resources are spent in the most effective and targeted ways to address the greatest needs.

Homeowner Repair, Reconstruction, or Relocation Program

It is critical that nonprofits and residents can access the funding, giving more flexibility to affected residents seeking replacement housing. Habitat encourages broadening the Homeowner Repair, Reconstruction, or Relocation Program in the Action Plan to allow nonprofit organizations to submit a



proposal on behalf of eligible families, and to be able to access the funding directly to do the single family home repairs. Many families, especially those with special needs and circumstances, will have a difficult time applying for and accessing CDBG-DR funding, and will need the support of the nonprofit sector to help them secure a grant. When residents do access the funding for homeowner assistance, the application process and required documentation must be taken into consideration because most of their belongings in many cases have been destroyed, so exceptions and accommodations should be allowed. In addition, Habitat encourages the ability of nonprofits to be able to directly apply for the funding. Granting nonprofits access to the funding will give more options and flexibility to affected residents with established relationships with the nonprofit community, and those populations that nonprofits can uniquely find and support, that need significant housing repairs.

Habitat, should be considered a delivery mechanism for this program and/or considered a qualified contractor. Using the Habitat model the CDBG-DR funds will go farther because of volunteer labor, technical expertise, and strong relationships with local residents and community organizations providing relief and recovery for disaster survivors. Additionally, because Habitat offers family services they can serve as both the contractor and case manager – providing support throughout the rebuilding process.

California Habitat affiliates are already deeply involved in the recovery efforts and can greatly benefit from the CDBG-DR funds to support our efforts currently underway. California affiliates engaged in 2017 wildfire recovery with their home building, repair, recycle, and rehabilitation statistics included are included below:

- Lake County Habitat for Humanity
- Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles
- Solano-Napa, Habitat for Humanity Inc.
- Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County
- Habitat for Humanity of Southern Barbara, Inc.
- Habitat for Humanity of Ventura County
- Yuba/Sutter Habitat for Humanity

New	Recycle	Rehab	Repair	Total
53	0	10	252	315

Specifically, Habitat has been providing supportive services to elderly Montecito residents to repair homes damaged by the mudslides, Habitat of Greater Los Angeles has been repairing homes from the 2017 Creek Fire, and Habitat Sonoma County has built cottages for displaced wildfire survivors.

Habitat for Humanity is committed to providing shelter to those in need and we are grateful for the opportunity to comment on such a critical plan, which has the power to offer life-changing support for those so deeply impacted by California's wildfires.

Thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Debbie Arakel".

Debbie Arakel
Executive Director
Habitat for Humanity California