



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

September 19, 2005

Daniel Sutherland
Director
Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Dear Mr. Sutherland

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of approximately 100 national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. One of the most important issues for individuals with disabilities is access to decent, safe, affordable, and accessible housing in the community. Housing can very well be the cornerstone of independence for people with disabilities. That is why the CCD has a very active task force focused solely on housing. Some of the members of the task force include the National Mental Health Association, The Arc of the United States, United Cerebral Palsy, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Volunteers of America, Lutheran Social Services in America, National Disability Rights Network, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, American Network of Community Options and Resources, United Spinal Association, and the National Association of State Mental Health Directors.

The recent disaster of Hurricane Katrina hitting the gulf coast region has left tens of thousands of individuals with all types of disabilities, as well as families with a member with a disability displaced and in need of affordable and accessible housing in their current locations across the nation. The CCD is extremely concerned that -- as FEMA addresses the housing needs of evacuees -- it is not taking into consideration the varied housing needs of individuals with disabilities and their families.

According to 2000 Census data, as well as 2003 American Community Survey data, the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana have very high rates of disability in all age ranges. This data also documents that individuals with disabilities are disproportionately poor and disproportionately unemployed. Many depend on federal Supplemental Security Income payments and Medicaid. However, despite access to SSI and Medicaid, people with significant and long term disabilities still experience extreme poverty. Nationwide, people with disabilities who rely on SSI are "priced out" of housing in every inch of our nation (Priced Out 2004, the Technical Assistance Collaborative & the CCD Housing Task Force).

In Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, people with disabilities between the ages of 21 and 64 are almost three times more likely to have an income that is below 30% of the state median. This makes them the poorest of the poor and those who will be most negatively affected when it comes to the search for affordable and accessible housing.

The CCD strongly urges FEMA to do everything in its power to ensure that people with disabilities do not end up with even higher rates of homelessness or being institutionalized because there is not affordable accessible housing available to them.

- Manufactured housing that is purchased for the use of evacuees must be accessible.
- New housing constructed with FEMA and other funds must meet accessibility requirements
- Permanent rental assistance – specifically Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers – must be made available to people with disabilities with incomes below 30 percent of median income on a long term – not temporary basis.
- Fair Housing, Section 504, and ADA civil rights protections related to housing for individuals with disabilities must not be waived.

We would like to meet with FEMA officials to discuss this issue in depth. We also will be taking these issues up with Congress and HUD.

However, our immediate goal is to get the housing needs of people with disabilities on the agency's radar screen before major decisions are made. If you have any questions, please contact Kathleen McGinley, National Disability Rights Network (202) 408-9514 or Kathy.mcginley@ndrn.org.

Thank you.

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National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

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The Arc/UCP Public Policy Collaboration

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