



February 11, 2013

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The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi:

The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) is writing to express our support for H.R. 592, the Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act. This bill, scheduled to be on the suspension calendar this coming Wednesday, February 13, 2013 and co-sponsored by Representatives Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Grace Meng (D-NY), will ensure the fair and equal treatment for houses of worship damaged in Hurricane Sandy.

JFNA is the national organization that represents and serves 154 Jewish Federations and 300 independent Jewish communities across North America. In their communities, Jewish Federations and volunteers is the central address for fundraising and an extensive network of Jewish health, education and social services. In response to Hurricane Sandy Jewish Federations have raised almost \$7 million in direct Sandy-related relief and allocated almost \$11 million to Sandy victims in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York.

The Stafford Act provides that private nonprofit entities – such as schools, hospitals and community centers – damaged in a natural disaster may receive financial grants from FEMA to repair their buildings. The Act does not list houses of worship among its list of examples of nonprofits so eligible; neither does the Act exclude houses of worship. To the extent that FEMA has provided aid to eligible programs run by houses of worship, the aid has not been provided on the same terms as the aid provided to other eligible nonprofits.

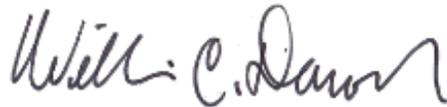
In the aftermath of Sandy, as with so many other natural disasters, churches, synagogues and other houses of worship are locations where essential response services have been provided to people in need – even while the church or synagogue itself has suffered extensive damage. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate for FEMA's aid program for private nonprofits to assist houses of worship with their rebuilding needs. Moreover, if houses of worship are

excluded from this otherwise religion neutral program – that unfair treatment would be improper anti-religious discrimination. Additionally, for almost 30 years, it has been FEMA’s mission to lead America to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic disasters. This has led to FEMA’s provision of disaster-related aide to parochial schools damaged by earthquakes

Current Supreme Court jurisprudence makes clear that religious institutions may receive government financial aid in the context of a broad program administered on the basis of religion neutral criteria. This is why houses of worship and other religious nonprofits can, and do, currently receive grants from DHS to improve their security and the Interior Department for historic preservation.

H.R. 592, the Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act, would ensure that the Stafford Act is consistent with these policies, and we ask that you vote in favor of this legislation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William C. Daroff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William C. Daroff
Vice President for Public Policy &
Director of the Washington Office

cc: Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ)
Representative Grace Meng (D-NY)