

February 12, 2013

Hon. Chris Smith
Hon. Grace Meng
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Smith and Meng,

Thank you for your efforts to correct a misguided policy of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that currently bars houses of worship from receiving federal disaster assistance for rebuilding damaged structures. Your work to insure that government assists private non-profit entities, including houses of worship, in an evenhanded way is very much appreciated.

In any major natural disaster, churches, synagogues and other houses of worship play indispensable roles in providing comfort and relief to those who have experienced loss. They bring food, water, clothing, and other essential supplies to those who are stranded or displaced. They care for the wounded and comfort the bereaved. Our communities are stronger because they are there.

When the houses of worship themselves have been damaged, the effects are often felt far beyond the membership. When an important part of the community infrastructure is damaged, the entire community suffers. Many times, churches continue serving their communities even after their own buildings have been destroyed.

FEMA does not violate the establishment clause when it administers a religion-neutral program of support for the rebuilding of community infrastructure. In fact, if religious organizations are specifically excluded when comparable secular organizations are included, the government's practice would be discriminatory. This is the clear conclusion of Supreme Court jurisprudence, and is consistent with current federal practice in the Department of Homeland Security and the Interior Department.

Thank you for your leadership in working to restore fairness to FEMA disaster assistance.

Sincerely,



Galen Carey

Vice President, Government Relations