

Congress of the United States

December 24, 2020

The Honorable Peter Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write to urge your approval of the State of Oregon's amended request for a direct housing mission in Lane County as part of its Major Disaster declaration granted by the President for wildfires and straight-line winds issued on Sept. 15, 2020 (DR-4562-OR). Nearly three months ago, Oregon's congressional delegation wrote you in support of the State's initial request for a direct housing mission for wildfire-ravaged counties. While we appreciate that FEMA approved such assistance for several counties, we were disappointed at FEMA's November 24, 2020 denial of the request for Lane County.

As you know, The Holiday Farm Fire destroyed 579 housing units and the affected Lane County residents continue living in motels, with friends and family, or in other temporary shelter, awaiting a more stable housing arrangement. For those who have been displaced, life in the Eugene-Springfield metro area is vastly different from the life they experienced "upriver" in their home communities. Informal community support networks have been uprooted, students pulled from school, and friends and family find themselves separated by great distance. Further, the minimum one-hour drive between temporary shelter and their home sites is too far to effectively participate in the rebuilding and recovery process.

While FEMA alleges that adequate housing stock exists in the Eugene-Springfield area to accommodate displaced residents, it is vitally important to remember that available housing stock is only one part of the equation. Many of the fire survivors had informal living arrangements, limited or no rental history, limited income, or other financial or personal circumstances that restrict their ability to be approved for long-term rentals in the market. Approving a direct housing mission for Lane County addresses those unique circumstances directly and ensures that our citizens are not left behind by their government.

We appreciate FEMA's willingness to work with the local, state, and community partners as Lane County and the state reconstituted their application. Your staff have provided excellent technical feedback and guidance that has allowed meaningful progress to be made since the initial application. Lane County has worked carefully with FEMA staff, the State of Oregon Office of Emergency Management, and local stakeholders to address the deficiencies identified in your initial denial letter. We believe the revised application easily fulfills all of FEMA's criteria for approval and we urge your approval forthwith.

As you are well aware, the longer that time passes from the start of a disaster, the harder it is for FEMA to engage eligible disaster survivors and many fall through the cracks. The population in Lane County eligible for direct housing is admittedly limited, but these are people who are most in need of Federal assistance and most likely to be lost to the system if we do not engage them now. Please take our urgent request for action and approve the State of Oregon's revised application as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and we look forward to your response.

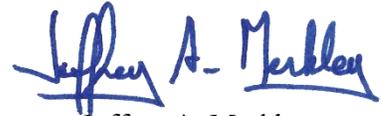
Sincerely,



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator

cc:

Michael O'Hare, FEMA Regional Administrator, Region X
Dolph Diemont, FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer, DR-4562-OR
Andrew Phelps, Director, Oregon Office of Emergency Management
Steve Mokrohisky, County Administrator, Lane County