

This morning the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee looks at the authorization of the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery Program, known as CDBG-DR.

We meet today in the wake of devastating tornadoes that have taken the lives of more than 80 people, torn apart families, and destroyed homes, businesses, and infrastructure across multiple states - including Kentucky, Illinois, and our colleague Senator Hagerty's state of Tennessee.

We have heard heartbreaking and infuriating stories, of lives torn apart, and workers put in danger.

I want to express my sincere condolences to the families and communities affected by these storms.

Even before this weekend's tragic events, we had already seen 18 natural disaster events. 538 people lost their lives. Losses exceeded \$1 billion in 2021.

From drought to flooding to severe storms, from wildfires to tropical cyclones to winter storms, these events touched all kinds of communities, all across the country. Homes and businesses were destroyed. Local economies were devastated.

None of our states is immune.

The people of Dayton and Trotwood are still working to recover from tornadoes that destroyed their neighborhoods in 2019.

Senator Menendez and Senator Kennedy's states, though thousands of miles apart, were both devastated by Hurricane Ida this summer.

With a changing climate, our country will continue to face extreme weather events and natural disasters. We must be better prepared to recover from these disasters quickly, efficiently, and equitably. And we must rebuild to make our homes and communities more resilient in the future.

Today's hearing will look at the critical role CDBG-DR plays in offering disaster relief and long-term recovery assistance to communities affected by disasters. And we'll discuss how we can improve that aid, through a permanent authorization of the program.

Since 1993, Congress has provided over \$95 billion in disaster recovery assistance to states, territories, and communities through supplemental CDBG disaster recovery appropriations.

This aid is particularly critical to low-income and middle class families, who are often hit the hardest by natural disasters, and who have the fewest resources to recover from them.

While Congress has relied on CDBG-DR to provide flexible, long-term recovery assistance to communities in need, we have never provided a permanent authorization for the program.

CDBG-DR is a valuable tool in the federal disaster response toolkit to help communities across the country pick up the pieces and rebuild following disasters.

The program has helped families and communities address needs that have been unmet by insurance and federal assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Small Business Administration.

But as valuable as this aid has been, we have also heard from disaster survivors and from state and local governments, the General Accountability Office, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development itself – that we can and should do better.

In the absence of a permanent authorization, HUD must issue new regulations with each appropriation.

We have heard that the delays and lack of predictability stemming from the current process:

- Delays in getting assistance out to families,
- Communities prevented from doing the kind of early planning that will be most effective,
- Confusion created for states, localities, and families over what resources are available to them.

Think about what these families are dealing with: Your home has been flooded or the business your family built was destroyed. You're trying to deal with insurance claims. Bills are piling up. Debt collectors are calling.

The last thing you want to deal with is more delays, more red tape, more confusion.

Variations in appropriations and regulatory requirements between disasters can impose administrative and operational challenges for both HUD and grantees - particularly smaller communities or those administering multiple grants - and hinder efforts to build capacity.

We also must do more to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our communities are not displaced, and that they can help their community recover.

In response to recommendations from GAO, HUD, and others, Senators Schatz, Collins, Young, Van Hollen, and Tester have offered the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act of 2021 (S. 2471) to authorize and improve the CDBG-DR program.

This is something that should be an opportunity for bipartisan, commonsense solutions – how we make government more efficient, and actually do the job it's supposed to do for the people we serve.

Today, we will hear from our witnesses about how authorizing the CDBG-DR program could help our communities recover, and deliver resources in a more timely, effective, and equitable manner.

Without objection, I would like to enter into the record a letter from the Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition in support of S. 2471.