

LIZZIE FLETCHER
7TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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AND TECHNOLOGY
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September 29, 2021

George P. Bush
Commissioner
Texas General Land Office
1700 N. Congress Ave
Austin, TX 78701

Re: State of Texas CDBG Mitigation Action Plan Amendment 1

Dear Commissioner Bush:

I welcome the opportunity to submit my comments on the State of Texas CDBG Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) Action Plan Amendment 1: Building Stronger for a Resilient Future put forth by the Texas General Land Office (GLO) (“Action Plan Amendment 1”). The funds in the Action Plan, which were appropriated by Congress, will reduce the risk of future flooding in the regions most impacted by significant rain events in 2015, 2016, and 2017, including Hurricane Harvey. It is an important step in addressing our disaster mitigation needs, and I thank you for your commitment to making Texas communities more resilient.

As you know, Hurricane Harvey devastated the Gulf Coast region in 2017, its nearly 60 inches of rain and related flooding claiming 68 lives and causing an estimated \$125 billion in damage. This destructive storm was the third in three years, following significant rain events in 2015 and 2016 in Houston and Harris County, the Memorial Day and Tax Day floods. Harris County, the most populous county in Texas, is the only county in Texas that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identified as “most impacted and distressed” from the Memorial Day flood in 2015, the Tax Day flood in 2016, and Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Texas’ Seventh Congressional District was one of the areas most devastated during each of these disasters.

The U.S. Congress passed the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018* (BBA) shortly after Hurricane Harvey and appropriated \$12 billion in CDBG-MIT funding for hazard mitigation activities in response to qualifying disasters in 2015, 2016, and 2017, including Hurricane Harvey. Congress intended these funds to be used to mitigate future risk in the areas most impacted by these disasters. The BBA is clear that areas that received the most CDBG Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds should receive the most CDBG-MIT funds to mitigate damages and lessen the need for CDBG-DR funding in the future.

After reviewing Action Plan Amendment 1, I am concerned that it fails the communities most impacted by Harvey and prior storms and fails to follow the intent of the Congress that appropriated the funds. On behalf of my constituents, and having consulted local leaders and experts, I ask that you review and make specific adjustments to Action Plan Amendment 1.

Action Plan Amendment 1 allocates \$750 million in CDBG-MIT funds for Houston and Harris County through the Harris County Mitigation Method of Distribution (MOD) program. This proposed directive forces Harris County to allocate funds to flood and drainage districts and municipalities within their jurisdiction, including the City of Houston. This amount is not sufficient for the projects that Harris County must undertake to protect our infrastructure and citizens, let alone for the projects led by the City of Houston and other local entities.

Because Harris County and Houston were not awarded any funds in GLO's \$2.3 billion funding competition, this allocation will be the sole direct funding source for our local governments to complete mitigation projects in Houston and Harris County. Considering the documented damage in Houston and Harris County in 2015, 2016, *and* 2017, more funds are needed in this allocation. I also share the concerns that the rigid scoring formulas used to award the \$2.3 billion in competition grants disadvantaged Houston and Harris County in favor of inland areas with less historical and future risk of damage.

As drafted, Action Plan Amendment 1 fails to follow the intent of the Congress and fails the citizens of Houston and Harris County. Accordingly, I ask that you revise Action Plan Amendment 1 to increase Harris County's allocation from \$750 million to \$1 billion and allocate \$1 billion to the City of Houston. This request is consistent with the public comments on Action Plan Amendment 1 by Harris County Flood Control District Interim Executive Director Alan Black.

I urge your office to take these considerations into account as you continue to develop the State of Texas CDBG Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) Action Plan. I also ask that you work with local leaders to make data-driven amendments to this plan so that it more accurately reflects the disproportionate damage Houston and Harris County have faced in recent years. I look forward to working with you to ensure that Houston and Harris County receive a fair and appropriate allocation of these funds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lizzie Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress