

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 4, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Carter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
2006 Rayburn House office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Carter, and Ranking Member Roybal-Allard:

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) continues to be the primary source of flood insurance coverage for homeowners and businesses, covering over 5 million households and businesses across the country. However, the substantial debt that the NFIP has taken on in recent years threatens the affordability of the premiums it offers and must be addressed in order to preserve the long-term stability of the program.

The NFIP is \$24.6 billion in debt, but this should come as no surprise. By Congressional design, the NFIP is largely self-sustaining – funded by insurance premiums and fees paid by policyholders – but it is not set up to fund large catastrophic events through policy premiums and fees alone. According to this design, the NFIP was self-supporting from 1986 until 2005, but the program took on substantial debt because of extraordinary losses incurred following hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma in 2005, and more recently, Superstorm Sandy in 2012 and Hurricane Matthew in 2016. The current debt represents funds that were expended to pay claims to homeowners who responsibly maintained flood insurance coverage when their homes were hit by these catastrophic storms. In other words, **the NFIP's current debt is the direct result of Congressional design and it is time that Congress takes responsibility for it.**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) agree that the NFIP is unlikely to be able to repay this debt even under the most favorable future conditions. In his testimony before the House Financial Services Committee on

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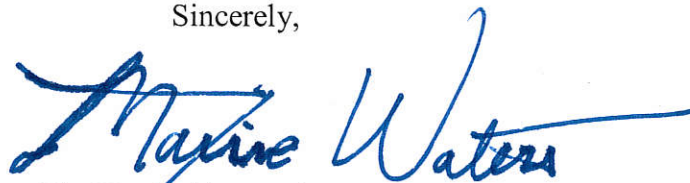
March 9, 2017, Roy E. Wright, the Deputy Associate Administrator for Insurance and Mitigation for FEMA, stated that the NFIP was forced to borrow in January 2017 just to manage the interest payments on its current debt.¹ In a January 2014 report on the NFIP, the GAO stated that the “NFIP is unlikely to be able to repay this debt in the near future, if ever.”² Further, NFIP has already introduced several increases in fees in recent years to build back from these losses and would need to implement substantially higher fees on NFIP policyholders in order to make any significant progress on paying down the debt.³

The longer that Congress ignores this issue, the longer that FEMA will be stuck paying substantial interest on debt that it will likely never be able to repay, which thwarts its ability to meet other Congressional objectives for the NFIP. Even at historically low interest rates, FEMA has spent approximately \$4 billion just to cover the interest on the program’s debt since hurricane Katrina. This is money that the federal government is spending to lend itself money, instead of building up the NFIP’s Reserve Fund for future catastrophic loss years. **It is clear that Congressional action is necessary to address the NFIP’s debt. That is why we respectfully request that you include the following language to forgive the NFIP’s debt:**

“Any repayment of amounts due from, and owned by, the Administrator as of September 30, 2017, in connection with the exercise of the authority vested to the Administrator to borrow such sums under section 1309 of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4016) and section 15(e) of the Federal Insurance Act of 1956, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2414(e) is hereby waived. The waived amounts may be treated as a public debt of the United States.”

Thank you for your consideration of this important request. Please contact Lisa Peto or Esther Kahng with Ranking Member Waters’ staff at (202) 225 -4247 with any questions about this letter.

Sincerely,



The Honorable Maxine Waters

¹ Testimony available at: <https://financialservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hhrg-115-ba04-wstate-rwright-20170309.pdf>

² GAO, “Flood Insurance: Strategies for Increasing Private Sector Involvement”, January 2014.

³ FEMA, “Quarterly NFIP Reserve Fund Report,” June 15, 2016

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