

# SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA LEGAL SERVICES

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## **RE: GULF COAST KATRINA/RITA TRAILER DEADLINE**

Over the past few weeks, local nonprofits involved in housing and homeless prevention work have been getting frantic calls from families who are at grave risk of becoming homeless due to the end of the FEMA trailer program in the Gulf Coast. In Orleans Parish alone, there are still about 1,000 FEMA trailers with approximately 75% occupied by preKatrina homeowners still struggling to rebuild and the other 25% occupied by preKatrina renters trying to find affordable rental housing. Statewide there about 2,800 FEMA trailers still being used in Louisiana and about another 2,000 in Mississippi.

Finding a permanent housing solution for each family is made more difficult by a common factor. Virtually every family that we have encountered that is still living in a trailer is occupied by someone that is either elderly, gravely disabled, or both. These special needs families are being "left behind" again in their own city, without the supports they need to become stably housed. It is no surprise that the remaining families left in FEMA trailers need intensive support services. While some case management assistance was offered, no **effective intensive case** management has been provided to each family still living in a FEMA trailer.

Several recent news articles show the continuing need for FEMA trailers or other forms of housing assistance for our most vulnerable elderly and disabled citizens. Take Mr. Ernest Hammond, 70 years of age, who could not get any financial help from the Louisiana Road Home program for his triplex since it was not the right kind of structure to qualify for a grant. If you can believe it, Mr. Hammond has collected thousands of aluminum cans to try to help him get the funds to rebuild his home. He has earned almost \$10,000 from collecting cans but that will not even begin to cover his rebuilding costs. Mr. Hammond told the N.Y. Times on May 8, 2009, "I need the trailer. I ain't got nowhere to go if they take the trailer." He told the Times Picayune on May 3, 2009, "This storm broke me. I need some help. And I got a long way to go." (See Attached)



Or take a look at the attached pictures of the plight of Mr. James Johnson who has a FEMA trailer near Gulfport, Mississippi. Mr. Johnson's home was destroyed by hurricane force winds. He has been living in a FEMA trailer since Hurricane Katrina. Mississippi's recovery plan does not cover damages caused by wind. For that reason, he has had no funds to repair his damaged property. Moreover, there is little alternative housing available where he can move. He has lived in the same community for over 50 years. He has told representatives from the Mississippi Center for Justice and the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law that he will move into a tent if his trailer is removed by FEMA. Ironically, as the attached photos indicate, there are hundreds of empty Katrina cottages less than 2 miles away from Mr. Johnson. Yet he has not been able to get one placed on his property.

These stories are unfortunately not unique. The special needs of those still lingering in FEMA trailers vary from folks suffering from terminal illnesses such as stomach cancer, double amputees who need accessible housing, those suffering from severe and debilitating depression, and a myriad of other difficulties which make dealing with a May 30, 2009 deadline extremely difficult. A mobility impaired client near New Orleans is fearful that FEMA will appear on May 30, 2009 and literally "roll my wheelchair out the door and leave me on the side of the road".

Our office along with the undersigned organizations, respectfully urges that other housing options be put in place along with increased intensive supportive case management services. Specifically, we ask for the following:

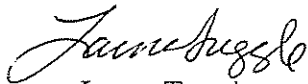
- 1) The Department of Housing and Urban Development should offer housing vouchers to all families still living in FEMA trailers who have incomes below 50% of area median and who meet all other voucher eligibility requirements. Many FEMA trailer families were referred by FEMA to HUD for the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP). But at that time, it was not generally known that housing vouchers would be made available. Many families did not want to make another temporary move and did not avail themselves of temporary DHAP rental assistance. With the end of trailers finally imminent and if a permanent housing vouchers were made available again, families would take advantage it.
- 2) HUD should encourage public housing authorities on the Gulf Coast to provide preferences for vouchers and public housing units for families and individuals still living in FEMA trailers.
- 3) HUD should encourage Gulf Coast states to use housing funds such as HOME tenant based rental assistance, stimulus funds, and/or unspent recovery funds such as disaster CDBG funds, to establish a transitional or emergency rental assistance program for families with incomes up to 80% of area median income who need some additional time to complete the rebuilding of their homes or who are seeking other permanent affordable housing. Rental assistance should be for 6 months with the possibility of up to a 6 month extension depending on family need and funding.
- 4) HUD should encourage communities in the Gulf Coast to provide a priority for short and medium length rental assistance to all FEMA trailer families under the

Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing funds available under the stimulus plan.

- 5) HUD should grant a waiver under the definition of income for the value of a Katrina damaged home which disqualifies many families from being income eligible for vouchers and other rental assistance
- 6) FEMA should provide an extension until January 31, 2010 to all homeowners living in FEMA trailers giving them more time to repair their homes or find other alternative housing. In Louisiana additional would also allow homeowners to appeal denials of Road Home grants or go to a Road Home closing. In Mississippi, additional time would allow time to match homeowners in need of permanent housing with available Katrina cottages that sit unused.
- 7) FEMA should provide an extension to all renters living in FEMA trailers giving them more time to obtain rental assistance or other permanent affordable housing until at least **July 31, 2009**.

We hope that you will strongly consider our requests made on behalf of our most vulnerable families and those still needing additional time to recover. We cannot afford to leave our most needy citizens behind again. Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact us at 504-529-1000 ext. 233 if you would like to discuss these recommendations.

Sincerely,



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NY Solidarity Coalition with Katrina and Rita Survivors  
NE Region Survivors Assembly

cc: Senator Mary Landrieu  
Mr. Fred Tombar, HUD Disaster Recovery  
Ms. Janet Woodka, Gulf Coast Recovery Office

Enclosures