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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

September 24, 2023

Senator Maria Cantwell
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray
United State Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Rep. Rick Larsen
U.S. Congress
2163 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

Dear Senator Cantwell, Senator Murray, and Rep. Larsen :

The Whatcom County Council would like to express our appreciation for your interest in helping our communities recover from the November 2021 flooding, and request your assistance addressing an urgent issue.

We recently learned that FEMA has implemented Immediate Need Funding (INF) status for all pending Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) awards. As you may recall from your visit, the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District submitted four HMGP grant applications to assist homeowners impacted by the 2021 flooding; two are for acquisitions and two are for elevations. The INF status means that FEMA will prioritize response and immediate recovery funds by deprioritizing obligations to other activities, including HMGP grants.

The people who own the properties included in this grant application have had their lives in limbo for more than 21 months with the expectation of assistance in the form of a buyout earlier this year. Many of them have suffered serious health conditions and one has passed way. Several are trying to make offers on new properties but with no clear timeframe on when the grant will be awarded, it is difficult for sellers to commit to a sale. The emotional and financial strain is becoming unbearable and these buyouts are for survivors' critical needs and housing, as they can't live in their damaged homes, can't rebuild them, and don't have the financial resources to survive without the proceeds from the sale of their homes.

One of the acquisition grants (DR-4481-01) included 12 residential properties that were substantially damaged in November 2021. Many of these homes are in the mapped floodway and owners are unable to rebuild their residences due to the Washington State law prohibiting reconstruction of residences in mapped floodways. This application met FEMA's requirements for expedited review (fast-track) as all of the properties were substantially damaged. Initially we expected the award in early spring; more recently we heard the award was expected in September. Then we learned of the INF status, which could deprioritize HMPG grants.

The Whatcom County Council respectfully requests that you use all available resources to help get the grant (DR-4481-01) awarded, whether that be by requesting a waiver for this specific HMGP grant or working to ensure Congress quickly appropriates adequate funding to the Disaster Relief Fund to address the need.

Thank you for your response to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Barry Buchanan, Chair
Whatcom County Council

Cc: Correspondence file
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