



# Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry

A voice for justice, equality and compassion in New Jersey

*Speaking out on Economic Justice*

## **Policy Brief: Make Sure Renters Get Their Fair Share of Post-Sandy Recovery Assistance and Resources.**

**Position:** The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry (UULM), representing members of the Unitarian Universalist communities of New Jersey, urges that the State allocate a fair share of Sandy relief funds to renters. Unitarian Universalists believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. We have been advocates for affordable housing for decades. In many New Jersey shore communities, finding affordable rental apartments has always been difficult. Now, with the devastation caused by Superstorm Sandy, providing affordable rental housing to fill this need is urgent! Renters comprise 43% of the households impacted by Sandy. Prior to Sandy affordable rental units were difficult to find; this disaster significantly exacerbated the situation. It is urgent that sufficient rental units be restored or constructed to meet the needs of hard-working renters throughout the State.

### **Background**

In late March the State submitted the Superstorm Sandy Disaster Recovery Action Plan to the federal government, outlining the needs in the nine counties designated by FEMA as most impacted by Sandy (Atlantic, Bergen, Cape May, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Union) and how the State proposed to address those needs. HUD approved the Action Plan, with amendments, on April 29, releasing \$1.8 billion of Community Development Block Grant funds to the State.

UULM, along with more than 75 other civil rights, religious, civic, labor, environmental, and housing organizations, urged HUD to modify the plan submitted by the Christie administration to increase the amount of funding directed to assisting renters in the impacted area. As submitted, only 22% of the funds were directed to renters — HUD's modifications increased this amount to 30%, an additional \$75 million, but still \$10 million less than needed to address the needs of the 43% of residents who are renters.

HUD also increased the amount directed to repairing damaged public housing units from the \$5 million proposed to \$20 million, and included provisions for potential added funding in future funding rounds.

UULM urges the State to increase the amount for rental housing from 30% to 40% in the second and third rounds of funding, coming later this year and next year. Furthermore, UULM urges that the State follow through on its promise and develop a concrete plan to focus spending on the most-impacted communities.

In addition, the State should ensure that people have a choice about where to rebuild. Funds should help people rebuild in both urban and suburban communities, and funds should be fairly distributed based on need. The State must neither impose, nor allow others to impose, barriers to rebuilding based on NIMBY attitudes.

Finally, the State must find a way to bridge the gap for those who need help now. Much of the recovery effort is currently focused on rebuilding or renovating homes; however, right now renters with lower incomes are facing significant rent increases because of the reduced supply. The State must implement concrete plans to identify (using either the unmet needs assessment completed by the Long-Term Recovery Group in each impacted county or another verified assessment tool) and assist renters who cannot find homes to replace the housing they lived in before the storm. A related aspect of this assistance must be a concrete plan to address the needs of those with limited English proficiency. HUD has required greater access to Sandy programs for those whose first language is Spanish, and some greater access for primary speakers of other languages.