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June 1, 2011

The Honorable Craig Fugate
Administrator
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Fugate:

I write in regards to the recent attempt by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to recoup aid given to thousands of disaster victims including those of the October 2007 fire that killed five people and destroyed 253 homes in San Diego County.

According to the information I received, FEMA has sent "notice of debt" letters to approximately 37 people in San Diego County. Despite acknowledgement from FEMA that these were not cases of fraud but rather errors made by the agency, recoupment is still being pursued. This is not only wrong but it is cruel!

Many of the victims affected by the disastrous wildfires lost everything, relying on the aid to help with emergency and rebuilding costs. Some have struggled with unemployment, medical issues and now are being asked to give back the needed aid that was given to them nearly 4 years ago. Rather than go after innocent victims, FEMA should continue to reduce the opportunity for waste and recover funds from individuals who commit fraud or abuse.

Further, I do not believe that Congress intended FEMA to go after victims that were given aid as a result of FEMA's errors. In addition, a 2007 lawsuit against FEMA discovered that the agency's procedures were rife with problems and only because of this did the agency overhaul its system in 2008, almost a year after the 2007 wildfires in San Diego. It is unjust to recoup money from disasters prior to 2008 when the agency's disaster application and recoupment process was clearly flawed.

The Honorable Craig Fugate

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I urge you to cease your efforts to recover money from victims of the San Diego 2007 wildfires and other victims of this unfair collection. Disaster victims should not continue to suffer!

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



BOB FILNER
Member of Congress

BF/lc

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