

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2024

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell,

Thank you for FEMA's work to serve the American people before, during, and after disasters. As members of the California Congressional delegation, we write to raise serious concerns regarding FEMA's proposed 20-day cutoff for reimbursement for emergency Non-Congregate Sheltering during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without resolution, local governments across California stand to lose more than \$300 million for previous expenditures which they reasonably believed would be reimbursed by your agency for their efforts to reduce COVID-19 spread.

At the start of the pandemic, unhoused people faced an unacceptable risk of exposure and infection in potentially unsafe encampments and congregate shelters. This risk was particularly acute for those over age 65 and for those with underlying medical conditions that made them more susceptible to the negative health effects of COVID-19. It was imperative that action be taken to ensure the most vulnerable members of our community could isolate indoors in the event of infection and to eliminate a major potential source of community spread. Accordingly, the State of California created and implemented Project Roomkey to provide non-congregate shelter options, such as hotels and motels, for high-risk people experiencing homelessness to protect human life and minimize strain on health care system capacity.

Over the course of pandemic response, 62,000 high-risk Californians were provided vital shelter. This undoubtedly lowered the likelihood of serious illness and death for an especially vulnerable community. It was a tremendous success and continues to serve as a blueprint for Project Homekey—an enduring version of the program administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

This safe shelter was a necessary emergency protective measure and the commitment by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reimburse cities, counties, and the State of California for the millions of dollars spent on leases, food, and service providers to run these hotels and motels was critical to the State's ability to protect Californians. And, thanks to early actions from President Biden in January 2021, federal reimbursement rates were raised from 75% to 100% and made retroactive to the start of the incident period.

However, an October 16, 2023, letter sent to the California Office of Emergency Services by Regional Administrator Robert Fenton stated that the reimbursements to local governments under California's COVID-19 Major Disaster Declaration (DR-4482-CA) would be limited to Project Roomkey stays of only 20 days or less from the June 11, 2021 to May 11, 2023 timeframe. This October 2023 policy decision comes long after local governments across our State had already expended significant local resources under Project Roomkey with the full expectation for reimbursement. We note that no previous cap had ever been noticed by FEMA.

The indefinite limit on the length of stay was a vital part of the program in many jurisdictions, both for public health and, in some cases, to allow people to transition into other housing or shelter. While not a perfect

solution for every person, it was a vital tool that prevented the mass outbreak of serious illness and death though some of our state's most vulnerable communities.

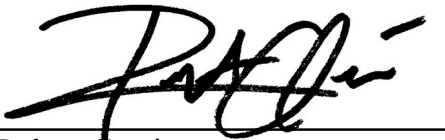
Any policy to withhold FEMA reimbursements for Project Roomkey stays which lasted longer than 20 days will collectively cost California cities and counties more than \$300 million at a time of incredible fiscal strain for local governments. On top of that, it could also jeopardize reimbursements that have already been received by some jurisdictions.

In order for local governments to do their part in future disaster situations, it is imperative that California cities and counties are able to recover pandemic costs without sacrificing essential services and their continued investment in housing and community resources.

We are grateful for FEMA's continued support of these vital efforts, and we respectfully urge you to reconsider any action that would limit the expected reimbursement to local governments for the administration of Project Roomkey. Our residents cannot afford to miss out on federal relief.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



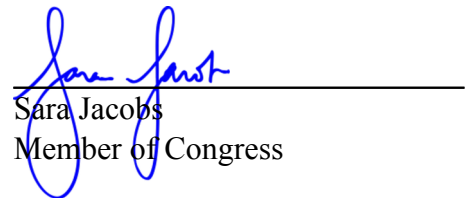
Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



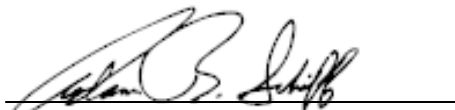
Mark Takano
Member of Congress



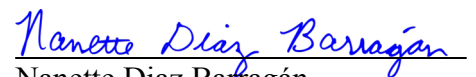
Katie Porter
Member of Congress



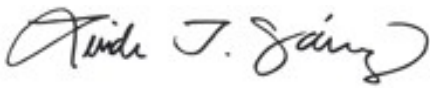
Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



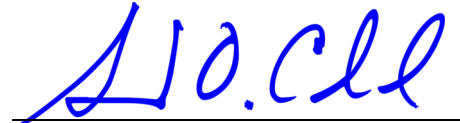
Adam B. Schiff
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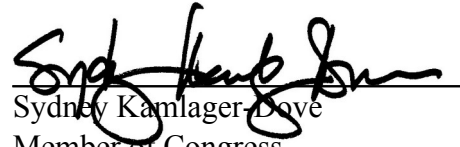
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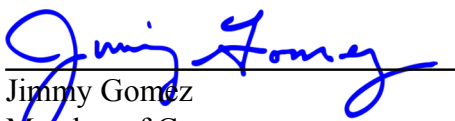
Barbara Lee
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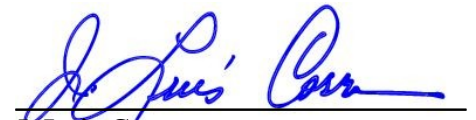
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



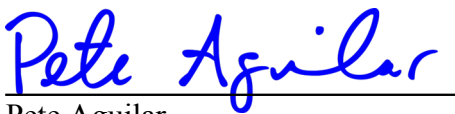
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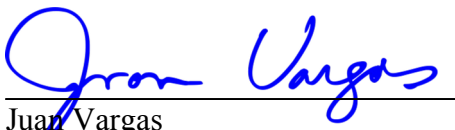
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



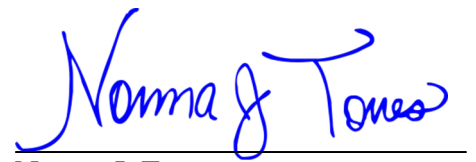
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