

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

December 7, 2011

Via Facsimile (205-280-2410)

Mr. Art Faulkner
Director
Alabama Emergency Management Association
Post Office Box 2160
Clanton, AL 35046-2160

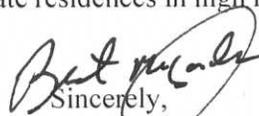
Dear Mr. Faulkner,

The most recent tornado devastation that occurred in Alabama has again heightened interest in safe room and storm shelter construction. As you know, Alabama is receiving substantial federal funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. One of the eligible uses is for the construction of storm shelters.

Storm shelter accessibility has long been an interest of mine. The Tornado Shelters Act of 2003, which I authored, permits federal Community Development Block Grants to be used for the construction of storm shelters in manufactured housing communities. My office has heard from many communities in the Sixth District of Alabama who are applying for FEMA funding to install community shelters. It has long been my position that community shelters are a more appropriate use for public funding than safe rooms in private residences. The federal government cannot, and should not, be expected to build a safe room for every private residence.

It is my belief that community shelters accessible to multiple families should be prioritized by the Alabama Emergency Management Agency. To that end, I request that the agency take steps to prioritize community shelters over individual safe rooms. The agency should consult other states to examine the possibility of means testing the program to ensure that only those truly in need receive safe room assistance. Any use of these resources should be concentrated in localities where storms are most likely to happen.

While I would encourage citizens to construct safe rooms in their residences, given limited resources, decisions need to be based on a policy of providing the maximum protection to the greatest number of our citizens. Given the unprecedented demand, the current guidelines need to be thoroughly evaluated to make sure they are operating at the greatest level of effectiveness for all citizens. Priority should go first to school and community shelters including senior centers and manufactured housing communities. Only then should taxpayer assistance be considered for the construction of safe rooms in private residences in high risk locations and low income communities.


Sincerely,


Spencer Bachus
Member of Congress