

SPENCER BACHUS
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Congress of the United States
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Washington, DC

December 6, 2011

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Via Facsimile (202-646-3600)

Mr. Craig Fugate
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472-0001

Dear Mr. Fugate,

The tornado devastation that occurred in my home state of Alabama and other states earlier this year has heightened interest in safe room and storm shelter construction. As FEMA continues the process of awarding funding to states under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program (Section 203 and 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster and Emergency Assistance Act), it is imperative that funds be used in a way to maximize the protection of our citizens and that the most effective and efficient use is made of taxpayer dollars.

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 worked with many localities in the Sixth District of Alabama on applying for FEMA funding for 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 FEMA and by state emergency management agencies. To that end, I request that FEMA analyze existing data and prepare a report that compares the number and cost of all residential safe rooms and community shelters built under your agency's programs. The most recent statistics on your website are from 2003. It would interest me to learn of FEMA's observations on these programs and what guidelines are currently in place to ensure that assistance goes to those truly in need. Other federal grant programs, such as the Community Development Block Grant program, require communities to prioritize uses and award funding accordingly.

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 shelters in schools and community shelters. Only then should FEMA continue funding safe rooms in private residences, and then only to high risk locations and low income communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Spencer Bachus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "B".

Spencer Bachus
Member of Congress

STB/ps