



Documents Obtained from Christie Administration Through Litigation Raise Questions of Mismanaged Sandy Relief Funds

Docs posted today with more to come after Thanksgiving; call center staff instructed to push Sandy victims off phone, not give answers on application status

November 25, 2013 - In response to litigation brought by Fair Share Housing Center following a July 2013 Open Public Records Act request, the Christie Administration has finally released an extensive cache of documents never before seen by the public. The documents raise concerns about a wide range of practices on the part of the administration in distributing federal Sandy relief funds, highlighting an overall lack of organization and planning and raising questions about the fairness of distribution of funds to date.

Fair Share Housing Center is working to analyze and make the documents available to the public. The Center is currently organizing the thousands of pages of documents the Christie Administration had refused to provide to the public in order to post that information on its website (www.fairsharehousing.org), with the first section being posted today and more coming after Thanksgiving. A few immediately discernible issues include:

- The state refused to provide funds to several thousand low and middle income (LMI) applicants for resettlement funds despite claiming it "could not find" LMI applicants.
- Both African-Americans and Latinos saw their applications disproportionately rejected in rebuilding programs.
- Programs and policies on the RREM and Resettlement programs changed several times with no notice to the public.
- The geographic distribution of RREM awards to date does not match the distribution of damage from the storm or stated policies on distribution of funds.
- The state's policies on manufactured homes (e.g. mobile homes) changed several times during the application process.

Kevin Walsh, Associate Director of Fair Share Housing Center, explained that the Center is currently analyzing and organizing the documents. "We plan to post a set of documents at the start of each week over the next several weeks on a different area relevant to the litigation," stated Walsh. "We know people want answers and we will do our best to present the data in a swift, clear and coherent manner. After a preliminary review, we believe the Christie administration has several difficult questions to answer."

Adam Gordon, Staff Attorney at Fair Share Housing Center, explained that the documents included instructions for call center workers to tell Sandy victims that they had a backlog of calls and needed to move on to others, regardless of whether or not there were others waiting on hold. Gordon stated, "The message conveyed through the call center script was that speed trumped helping people. More thought went into getting people who did not fit a narrow definition off the phone than getting the vast majority of those affected back in their homes." For example:

- [Call center employees were told](#) that if renters displaced from their home called the hotline, they should claim that "the State is working as quickly as it can to put programs in place to help you" but then move quickly to saying "I wish I had more time to talk with you, but I have a lot of your neighbors on hold waiting to speak with me" - whether or not there were actually people on hold.
- The eGrants system set up by the State did not accurately reflect the status of applications. As such, [call center employees were told not to give callers any information](#) on the status of their applications from the RREM and Resettlement programs.
- When some employees, presumably out of sympathy for applicants situations, gave callers the phone numbers for higher up officials in the recovery, [they were admonished and told](#) "We should not be telling callers to call the Recovery Centers or Headquarters for answers to questions regarding their status or anything else."
- In early July, the company running the call center, which was located in Florida, set up another call center, in Oregon. However, [employees at that call center were not given access to the full set of information on the program](#) - and as such they had to put people on hold or hang up and call the other call center before helping applicants.

All Call Center Training Material documents provided by the Christie Administration in response to the litigation, which show what call center employees were told to do in responding to applications from May-July of this year, are being made publicly available for the first time by Fair Share Housing Center [here](#).

"These documents should have long ago been made public directly by the Christie Administration on their Sandy website," Gordon added. "Because the Christie Administration has failed in its promises of transparency, we will be posting on our web site all of the documents we received through litigation."

Fair Share Housing Center, founded in 1975 is based in Cherry Hill. It is the only public interest organization devoted entirely to defending the housing rights of New Jersey's poor through implementing the Mount Laurel doctrine, which requires that each municipality provides its fair share of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people.

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