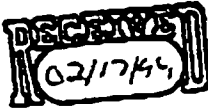


STATE OF NEBRASKA

EXECUTIVE SUITE

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February 3, 1994

E. Benjamin Nelson
GovernorJames Lee Witt, Director
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Washington, DCRE: FEMA-0998-DR-NE
Crisis Counseling Application - Regular Program

Dear Mr. Witt:

This constitutes an appeal of the FEMA decision to deny Nebraska Crisis Counseling Regular Program funding under the Robert T. Stafford Act (FEMA letter, December 23, 1993, Attachment 1). The denial is based on the FEMA's decision that the state and local resources are sufficient to respond to the needs resulting from the major disaster.

The denial of this application for FEMA Crisis Counseling Regular Program appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the disaster which befell Nebraska in 1993 and, perhaps, is also indicative of a more profound lack of understanding of rural life and its economics. Those FEMA internal review documents which Nebraska received seemed to show an urban perspective on the disaster and on its human toll. FEMA's internal review continually emphasized the need to establish and document storm damage peculiar to urban areas; e.g. large numbers of people in shelters, homes destroyed, real property damaged, and related criteria. Viewing Nebraska's case from an urban perspective explains FEMA's early and unshakable insistence that Nebraska's non-participation in the Crisis Counseling Immediate Services Program proved that Nebraska did not need assistance.

In rural areas, the Nebraska storms damaged not peoples' homes and real estate (though we did sustain some of this damage as well) as much as it attacked peoples' livelihoods in the agricultural economy. Not only were the livelihoods of farmers impacted, but also the livelihoods of a large number of non-farm rural and urban residents dependent on our overwhelmingly agricultural economy. Because of the storms, which led to the FEMA-998-NE declarations, Nebraskans are harvesting their smallest corn crop in ten years and this will have economic repercussions throughout the affected areas. These aggregate views of the disaster miss the personal and human impacts which are just now -- as our agricultural economy enters its refinance cycle -- being felt. We have had a 50% increase in Nebraska's statewide rural response crisis hotline calls this past quarter. Our interagency Rural Response Partnership has met and the consensus is that needs are just now increasing, and a similar report comes from Farm Mediation Services in terms of emotional stress noted in farm mediation activities.

A sample is at Attachment 2.

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In denying Nebraska's request for assistance, FEMA was critical of the economic ("farm crisis") basis of the Nebraska application. The implication was that the need assessment was based primarily on residual effects of the economic crisis of the 1980s. This is not the case. Though the impact on people may be similar, the distress experienced by people in rural Nebraska is the direct result of the flooding, wind and hail damage which hit the state last spring and summer creating the presidentially declared disaster. State and local crisis counseling resources are not sufficient to support an adequate response to this unexpected calamity.

This disaster has had a severe effect on the rural counties of Nebraska. The more urban areas including Omaha and surrounding area (Douglas and Sarpy Counties), Lincoln (Lancaster County), Grand Island (Hall County), Kearney (Buffalo County), have sufficient resources.

There are 32 of the 52 declared counties which are "Ag-Dependent" counties, meaning 20% or more of their wages and proprietary income in the county comes from agriculture. It should also be noted that 18 of these counties have had two or more federal disaster declarations between 1990 and 1993. Of these 18 ag-dependent counties, one has had three declarations and two have had four declarations. These rural counties are the ones needing the crisis counseling regular services program. I am requesting that you reconsider your decision based on the needs of the residents of these rural counties.

In addition, we have evidence to suggest that Nebraska was not treated fairly in the review process. For example, please note the letter, dated October 27, 1993 (Attachment 3) from Mr. Burns to Dr. Flynn at The Center for Mental Health Services expressing Mr. Burns' recommendation that Nebraska's request be denied. This is dated a full month before the CMHS Review Report was issued. The CMHS Report was to provide Mr. Burns with the expert advice he should have used to review the Nebraska application (November 29 letter, Attachment 4). Obviously, either Mr. Burns had made up his mind without the benefit of the expert advice provided for in the established review procedure, or the experts had made up their minds without the benefit of the review committee's advice. Throughout the review process staff at Nebraska state agencies had great difficulty in finding out the status of the Nebraska Application and in locating responsible parties to talk to about concerns.

Nebraskans, especially rural Nebraskans, are a proud and self-reliant people. Many of them are suffering severe emotional distress due to the devastation that the flood and weather-related disasters have caused. They need and are entitled to help. I believe Nebraska submitted an accurate grant application that clearly documents the needs of Nebraskans and proposes a sound strategy for responding to those needs. I am very

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concerned that ignorance of rural and Midwest realities and a flawed review process continue to deny Nebraskans the help they need. I urge you to expedite this appeal.

Sincerely,



E. Benjamin Nelson
Governor

EBN:tsd

xc: President Clinton
Senator J. James Exon
Senator Bob Kerrey
Rep. Bill Barrett
Rep. Doug Bereuter
Rep. Peter Hoagland
Thomas R. Litjen, Government Affairs Consultant
Washington, D.C.
Richard L. Sema
State Coordinator Officer at State Civil Defense
Alex Burns
Federal Coordinating Officer
Frank E. Young, M.D., PhD
Office of Emergency Preparedness
Department of Health and Human Services

 *** ACTIVITY REPORT ***

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