

September 2, 2015

The Honorable Julian Castro
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Castro:

I hope this letter finds you well.

By now, I am sure you have heard much of the frustration and anger New Yorkers have expressed at the latest revelation that some folks impacted by Hurricane Sandy might be forced to return some of the federal assistance money they have received.

Respectfully, I write to add my perspective.

In the last few weeks leading up to the 10th anniversary of Katrina, I have found myself seemingly obsessed with reading about the experience of the city of New Orleans. I have devoured every article, and expose, and I am just about finished with Gary Rivlin's *Katrina: After the Flood*.

Some of what I have read I already knew, but much of it is new to me. All of it underscores what New Orleans city officials detailed for me during my 48-hour visit to New Orleans in January of 2013, just a few months after Sandy. Although I knew the cautionary counsel these officials were offering to me was the unvarnished truth, nothing could have prepared me for the Sandy experience of the last 32 months.


My community was battered by this "act of God," but what has come after is even more heartbreaking, despite the best efforts of so many. The bureaucratic hurdles, the fits and starts of "the process," and candidly, the mistakes and poor choices made by government from the earliest moments after the storm, have combined to push people to, and sometimes past, the breaking point.

I do not believe this current situation is the creation of your agency. You might have taken some misplaced hits this last week, but having lived with the aftermath of Sandy for almost three years, and having become a student of Katrina, I think I understand what has transpired here. It might not rise to the level of "Brownie you are doing a heck of job," but the blame is evident. What is more opaque, however, is our collective willingness to do all we can to overcome earlier transgressions, so that those good people whose lives have been turned upside down can find a path to move on with their lives. I write to ask for your help in that endeavor.

I ask you to ensure there is no attempt to claw back National Flood Insurance program payments made to my constituents. Thank you for your time, attention and understanding.

With much appreciation, I remain,

Sincerely yours,


James S. Oddo
President, Borough of Staten Island

