



National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. | Dr. Julius R. Scruggs, President
Office of Disaster Management | Dr. Randy G. Vaughn, Director

ACTION ALERT!

February 12, 2013

Dear National Baptist Family,

Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey introduced HR 592, which would amend the Robert T. Stafford Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to clarify ***that houses of worship are eligible for certain disaster relief and emergency assistance on terms equal to other private nonprofit facilities.*** Co-Sponsors are Congressmen Peter King Grace Meng of New York. You can help ensure this bill's passage by contacting your Congressman and urging his/her support. To assist you with this action, a sample advocacy letter and the actual text of the bill are included for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Randy G. Vaughn

Randy G. Vaughn
Director, Disaster Management, NBC, USA, Inc.

Advocacy Letter Template

[Insert Date]

Your Name

Address

City, State. Zip Code

The Honorable [Insert Congressman's Name]

***You can find your Congressman at <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/> ***

Address

Dear Congressman [Insert Last Name]:

My name is [Insert Your Name] and I reside at [Insert Your Address] in [Insert Your City]. I am a member of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. and a member of [Insert name of the church].

I am writing you to ask that you pass H.R. 592 which would allow houses of worship to be eligible for certain disaster relief and emergency assistance on terms equal to other private nonprofit facilities under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

Dozens of National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. houses of worship were directly impacted by Hurricane Sandy. [Provide a story about a church perhaps impacted by Hurricane Sandy and the impact it has had on the church's recovery]

The faith based community is a central pillar to aiding communities in responding to and recovery from disasters and are essential to the fabric of the communities in which they reside. Disaster assistance for faith facilities has long been limited under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, thus critically hampering the ability of the faith community to mobilize and help their community when most needed. H.R. 592 will provide much needed aid to houses of worship.

I appreciate your consideration of H.R. 592 and ask that you swiftly pass H.R. 592.

Thank you for your time and considering my request.

Sincerely,

[Insert Your Name]

H. R. 592

To amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to clarify that houses of worship are eligible for certain disaster relief and emergency assistance on terms equal to other eligible private nonprofit facilities, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 8, 2013

Mr. Smith of New Jersey (for himself, Ms. Meng, and Mr. King of New York) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

A BILL

To amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to clarify that houses of worship are eligible for certain disaster relief and emergency assistance on terms equal to other eligible private nonprofit facilities, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. **SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the “Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act of 2013”.

SEC. 2. **FINDINGS.**

Congress finds the following:

- (1) Hurricane Sandy inflicted catastrophic damage in the Northeastern United States.
- (2) Houses of worship across the Northeast’s many faiths and denominations were among the private nonprofit facilities that sustained damage.
- (3) Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship throughout communities in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and elsewhere play an essential role in the daily lives of the communities.
- (4) The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) public assistance program provides financial grants for the repair of various types of private nonprofit facilities.

(5) Among the types of nonprofits to which FEMA provides such grants are those in which citizens gather and engage in a variety of educational, enrichment, and social activities. These activities are essential to community building and occur in houses of worship.

(6) Under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.), FEMA's disaster relief program is a general government program under which assistance is provided in the wake of a natural disaster using criteria that are neutral with regard to religion.

(7) Congress has previously enacted legislation providing financial assistance to religious nonprofit institutions, including houses of worship, on terms equal to other eligible nonprofit institutions.

(8) Such legislation is consistent with recent precedents of the Supreme Court of the United States and legal opinions issued by the Office of Legal Counsel of the Department of Justice.

SEC. 3. INCLUSION OF HOUSES OF WORSHIP AS PRIVATE NONPROFIT FACILITIES ELIGIBLE FOR DISASTER RELIEF.

(a) Definition of Private Nonprofit Facility.—Section 102(10)(B) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122(10)(B)) is amended to read as follows:

“(B) ADDITIONAL FACILITIES.—In addition to the facilities described in subparagraph (A), the term ‘private nonprofit facility’ includes any private nonprofit facility that provides essential services of a governmental nature to the general public (including museums, zoos, performing arts facilities, community arts centers, community centers, including houses of worship exempt from taxation under section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, libraries, homeless shelters, senior citizen centers, rehabilitation facilities, shelter workshops, and facilities that provide health and safety services of a governmental nature), as defined by the President.”.

(b) Repair, Restoration, and Replacement of Damaged Facilities.—Section 406(a)(3) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5172(a)(3)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(C) HOUSES OF WORSHIP.—A church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other house of worship, and a private nonprofit facility operated by a religious organization, shall be eligible for contributions under paragraph (1)(B), without regard to the religious character of the facility or the primary religious use of the facility.”.

(c) Applicability.—This section and the amendments made by this section shall apply to the provision of assistance in response to a major disaster or emergency declared on or after October 28, 2012.