



STATE AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION ASSIST IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA

Since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast, over 40 state agencies have been involved in some capacity. To date, Congress has appropriated \$62.3 billion for disaster response and relief. It is anticipated that Public Assistance Grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will reimburse state agencies for most of the costs associated with the immediate disaster response activities. Federal funds for clearing roads are also available through the Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief Program. The following summary provides examples of major areas of assistance provided by state agencies as well as related federal funding sources.

DISASTER RESPONSE. The Governor's Division of Emergency Management is responsible for mobilization and deployment of state resources to respond to major disasters, and coordinates the efforts of state agencies, local governments, schools, hospitals, and other entities (such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army) through the State Operations Center at the Department of Public Safety (DPS). The Texas National Guard, the Texas Engineering Extension Service (Texas Task Force), the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the Texas Forest Service deployed units who performed search and rescue operations in areas impacted by the hurricanes. The Texas National Guard deposited material into the levee breaches in Louisiana. To assist with the evacuation of hospital and nursing home patients, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) provided emergency medical service personnel and ambulances, and the Department of Aging and Disability Services made arrangements for evacuees requiring nursing facility care. DPS, in conjunction with the Texas Department of

Transportation (TxDOT), performed highway transport and traffic management, particularly for the evacuation of Texas residents in the path of Hurricane Rita. Approximately 8,200 offenders from eight units of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) required evacuation, as well as 323 offenders at Texas Youth Commission (TYC) facilities.

A number of agencies have been involved with providing security or other services at disaster recovery centers and shelters. The Texas Building and Procurement Commission developed a contract for transportation and lodging of displaced persons. Many agencies provided equipment as well as supplies, such as water, ice, cots, tents, shower units, porta-johns, Meals Ready to Eat, and fuel. To handle the influx of victims seeking information and referral, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) expanded the 2-1-1 hotline system, with the volume of calls expanding from roughly 2,500 per day to 10,000 per day following Hurricane Katrina.

TxDOT, the Texas Forest Service, and the Texas National Guard have all been involved in clearing debris created by Hurricane Rita from highways and rights of way. In addition, the Public Utility Commission monitored the restoration of electric power to 1.6 million Texans.

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT. Following Hurricane Rita, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality monitored refineries and chemical plants in the Beaumont-Port Arthur-Orange areas; inspected Superfund sites, the Lake Livingston Dam, and the Lake Conroe Dam; provided daily public water supply system information; investigated fish kill events in Alligator Bayou and Beaumont; and responded to spills and other

environmental concerns. The General Land Office responded to coastal spills and oversaw the cleanup of large commercial fishing vessels and recreational vessels in the Sabine Pass area. The Texas Department of Agriculture conducted crop assessments, and the Texas Civil Air Patrol surveyed critical infrastructure. Teams of experts from the Texas Historical Commission traveled to Louisiana, Mississippi, and the ravaged areas of Texas to assess damage to historic structures.

DAMAGE TO STATE BUILDINGS. Substantial damage from Hurricane Rita was incurred at four institutions in the Texas State University System: Lamar University, Lamar Institute of Technology, Lamar State College – Orange, and Lamar State College – Port Arthur. At Lamar University in Beaumont, 20 roofs were damaged, covering approximately 600,000 square feet. FEMA will reimburse the state for a large portion of the repairs.

TDCJ indicated that nine units in the path of Hurricane Rita suffered damage, with the most serious occurring at Gist State Jail (2,276 beds) and the LeBlanc Unit (1,224 beds). A dormitory roof at the Stiles unit was damaged, and perimeter fencing was blown over. Water damage and computer equipment losses were incurred at TYC's Al Price State Juvenile Correctional Facility in Beaumont and Crockett State School in Crockett.

HEALTH CARE. A federal waiver has been approved allowing the Texas Medicaid and CHIP programs to provide services to Hurricane Katrina evacuees for five months at 100 percent federal reimbursement, and a federal uncompensated care fund has been established for those evacuees not eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. Federal legislation has been introduced to provide Medicaid

and CHIP coverage beyond five months, but prospects for reimbursing the state for the long-term impact of providing health care are uncertain. Approximately 1,000 evacuees were transferred to Texas nursing facilities.

DSHS was awarded \$150,000 in Emergency Response Grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and should receive federal funds for crisis counseling from FEMA as well. In addition, Congress passed legislation providing preferential treatment for the reallocation of Vocational Rehabilitation funds to states impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services is eligible for \$1.7 million to provide assessment, counseling, training, job placement and other support services for disabled individuals.

AID FOR INDIVIDUALS. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Response and Recovery Act was signed into law September 21, 2005 and will allow states assisting families affected by Hurricane Katrina to access TANF Contingency Funds. Texas may spend up to \$97 million, and funds are available through August 31, 2006. Prior rules regarding use of Contingency Funds, such as repayment of the funds and increased state maintenance of effort will not be in effect. Work requirements and time limits on the receipt of cash assistance are also waived for families in need of short-term assistance as a result of the hurricane.

For victims of Hurricane Rita, the HHSC is determining eligibility for FEMA's Assistance for Individuals and Households program, which can cover items such as lodging expenses, rental assistance, home repairs, transportation costs, and other disaster-related needs. Clients must demonstrate that alternative assistance from sources such as insurance proceeds or loans is not available. There is a 25 percent matching requirement for states. The Texas Department of Insurance has been providing assistance to evacuees with insurance questions and submission of claims.

NUTRITION SERVICES. A number of federal entitlement programs are providing nutrition services to displaced individuals.

Children enrolling in school have access to the federal School Lunch and Breakfast programs, and about 6,000 evacuees have received assistance through the DSHS's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program (100 percent federally funded).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture authorized states to pre-load electronic benefit cards for displaced residents with \$50 worth of assistance before applications for Food Stamps were processed. HHSC maintained extended hours in 47 offices and provided staff at shelters and disaster recovery centers for processing applications. About 125,000 evacuee households (225,000 people) were certified for Food Stamp benefits, which are 100 percent federally funded.

EDUCATION. The Texas Education Agency has set up toll-free hotlines to assist local schools in registering evacuees for school and to handle questions from Louisiana teachers seeking teaching opportunities in Texas. At least 45,129 children displaced by Hurricane Katrina have reportedly enrolled in Texas public schools.

The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has proposed that \$1.9 billion in funding be appropriated for distribution to school districts (including charter schools) enrolling at least 10 displaced children. This funding would reimburse districts for the unexpected cost of educating these new children for the 2005–06 school year. Funding would be granted directly to districts, based on the number of displaced students enrolled multiplied by 90 percent of the state's average per pupil expenditure for education, with a maximum annual payment of \$7,500 per child. To date, Congress has not taken action on this proposal.

USDE officials indicate that No Child Left Behind standards for annual yearly progress may be waived for schools or districts that have been adversely impacted by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita due to enrollment of large numbers of displaced students.

USDE's funding proposal to Congress also includes providing aid to colleges and universities receiving displaced students.

Colleges and universities would receive a \$1,000 payment for each displaced student. At least 5,472 evacuees have reportedly enrolled in Texas public and private colleges.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) allotted \$2.6 million for the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to process the increased claims for Unemployment Insurance and Disaster Unemployment Assistance related to Hurricane Katrina. An additional \$2.1 million in federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance is anticipated for Hurricane Rita. TWC hired more than 130 temporary staff, and as of October 13 had processed 60,393 claims related to Hurricane Katrina and 39,134 claims related to Hurricane Rita. TWC had a presence at evacuation shelters and created two toll-free hotlines: (1) to assist evacuees in filing and (2) to connect employers who wish to hire displaced people.

USDOL also announced up to \$75 million in National Emergency Grants for Texas to create temporary employment for 37,500 dislocated individuals in the clean up of public and nonprofit facilities; to provide humanitarian assistance to disaster evacuees; and to provide job training to those settling in Texas. Funds may be used to make needs-related payments to individuals not qualified for Disaster Unemployment Assistance or Unemployment Insurance, or for those who have exhausted those benefits. Other allowable uses include dissemination of information on accessing benefits; establishment of temporary transition centers in or near the greatest concentration of evacuees; and crisis and financial counseling. USDOL also awarded \$2.5 million to fund 25 Reintegration Counselors for expediting individuals' return to the workforce.

The Federal Funds Analysis Team of the Legislative Budget Board conducts research on federal legislation and federal funding issues which impact the state budget.

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