

In a keenly awaited step along Vermont's path to recovery from Irene, Senator Patrick Leahy (D), Senator Bernie Sanders (I), Congressman Peter Welch (D) and Governor Peter Shumlin (D) Friday announced that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is releasing \$21.6 million in community rebuilding funds to Vermont from a newly enacted appropriations bill.

This is one of the largest single releases of federal disaster relief grants to Vermont. Two features of the CDBG program make these funds especially useful: the program's flexibility enables the state to forge Vermont-specific plans for using them, and these funds can be used in as a state match in leveraging help under other federal disaster recovery programs. Vermont will use the emergency funds from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to help communities rebuild homes and businesses damaged or destroyed by Tropical Storm Irene. Vermont is one of eight states receiving grants, approved by HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, which come from topped-up emergency relief funds in an annual funding bill approved by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in November. The emergency CDBG funds can be used to relieve the affordable housing shortage worsened by the storm and to help rebuild housing units, provide loans to homeowners, and help rebuild essential community facilities.

As a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and of its HUD subcommittee, Leahy was instrumental in ensuring that the disaster assistance funds were included in the final appropriations package. Leahy said, "This is a major building block in Vermont's recovery. These are funds for made-in-Vermont answers for specific needs across our state. This will enable the state to offer vital help homeowners, to aid in repairing crucial community facilities and to rehabilitate and rebuild rental units for affordable housing. I thank Secretary Donovan for his prompt and caring work in allocating resources that will greatly help our communities and their citizens to get back on their feet."

Senator Sanders noted that "Vermont was facing a shortage of affordable housing before Irene hit, and like the rest of the country, our state is facing the effects of the prolonged economic recession. These funds will go a long way toward repairing or replacing damaged housing, supporting economic development efforts, and creating jobs for Vermonters. This news couldn't have come at a better time."

Welch said, "Vermont has made incredible progress recovering from Tropical Storm Irene. But there are still countless Vermonters struggling to get back on their feet. These funds will pay for

Vermont-specific needs and lend a helping hand to those who need it most."

"We are extremely grateful for the work of the delegation, led by Senator Leahy, to secure this funding for Vermont. We are going to put it to work rebuilding homes, businesses and communities," Governor Shumlin said. "To begin, we'll provide matching funds to cities and towns for buyouts that will help Vermonters recover their losses and move away from dangerous, flood-prone areas." According to Recovery Officer Sue Minter and Secretary Lawrence Miller, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development will also use the funding to meet Irene-related needs identified at meetings through the Community Recovery Partnership and public hearings.

"Last year's floods continue to present a huge hardship on the lives and livelihoods of Vermonters," said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. "These funds, will supplement other forms of disaster assistance to put these communities on the path toward long-term recovery."