

Senator Patrick Leahy (D), Senator Bernie Sanders (I), Congressman Peter Welch (D) and Governor Peter Shumlin (D) announced Friday that Vermont has been granted a long-awaited federal waiver allowing the use of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) disaster relief funds in Windham County.

The waiver, which applies to \$21.6 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds provided to the state by HUD in January 2012 for Irene recovery efforts, eases the original conditions requiring the state to use 80 percent of the funds in the "most impacted and distressed" counties. Initial assessments done by HUD of the damage left behind by Tropical Storm Irene indicated that Washington and Windsor Counties were most in need of the federal funds. The state requested a dispensation of the HUD regulations in order to accommodate unmet housing and economic recovery needs in Windham County.

With the announcement of the waiver, the state now will be permitted to use up to \$4.5 million to assist in disaster recovery efforts in Windham County. CDBG funds are allocated to support long-term recovery efforts, restoration of infrastructure and economic revitalization efforts following major disasters.

In a joint statement, Leahy, Sanders and Welch said: "This waiver provides crucial flexibility to the state and will help the cities and towns of Windham County continue on the road to recovery. So many resilient Vermonters are still working to rebuild their lives in the wake of Irene. These investments will support the residents of Windham County as they recover and move forward."