

Officials seek Perry's help getting federal funds

By Leigh Jones | Posted: Thursday, September 10, 2009 12:00 am

A countywide coalition of faith-based organizations is appealing to Gov. Rick Perry to use his influence with the Texas Department of Rural Affairs to get the Houston-Galveston area more disaster recovery money than it stands to receive under a funding model announced last month.

The proposed funding model would give the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Ike a much smaller slice of the federal funds than they deserve members of Gulf Coast Interfaith said Wednesday.

The federal money sent to the state for disbursement was divided into two allocations — one awarded in March and the second scheduled to be awarded before the end of the year.

For the first round of funding the state used damage estimates provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to determine how much each region should receive.

But for the second round the state created its own funding model based on Ike's winds storm surge and flooding. Because the weather model didn't give any more weight to more populated areas rural communities north and west of Galveston County received more of the funding than they did the first time.

"When the federal government allocated \$2.4 billion for hurricane damage they weren't looking just at weather but at damage to businesses and houses" Gulf Coast Interfaith member Barbara Crews said. "We think that's the most fair method of allocating the money."

Under the proposed weather-based funding model the Houston-Galveston Area Council would get 58.9 percent \$1.4 billion of the \$2.4 billion set aside for several councils of government.

But according to FEMA 71.5 percent of houses in the Houston-Galveston area received some kind of damage and the agency provided 72.4 percent of its individual assistance money and 81.2 percent of its public assistance money in the area.

By comparison the Deep East Texas Council of Governments would get 10.6 percent \$254.4 million of the total funding.

But only 3.8 percent of houses in that area had hurricane damage and FEMA has spent only 2.7 percent of its individual assistance money and 4 percent of its public assistance money in the area.

Gulf Coast Interfaith is lobbying the state agency in charge of the allocations to decrease funding for the Deep East Texas Council of Governments and a pool of inland councils and increase the Houston-Galveston Area Council's share by 10.5 percent or \$127.4 million.

If the funding model isn't changed the Houston-Galveston area will get the equivalent of \$3800 per house compared to the Deep East Texas Council's \$13000 per house.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council which represents 12 counties received 62 percent \$814 million of the first \$1.3 billion funding allocation.

This time the council would get only 36 percent \$623 million of the \$1.7 billion total an amount that includes an adjustment for getting too much the first time.

"If you believe this is inequitable write e-mail or call the state" Joe Compian another member of Gulf Coast Interfaith said.

The cities of Galveston and League City both passed resolutions in opposition to the proposed funding model.

Residents have until the end of the day Monday to lodge a complaint.

+++

Disaster Recovery Division

P.O. Box 17900

Austin TX 78760-7900

Fax: 512-936-0356

E-Mail: dractionplan2comments@tdra.state.tx.us