

State of New Jersey

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Takes Major Step Forward to Provide More Funding to Sandy-Impacted Homeowners

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Homeowners Still Rebuilding from Superstorm Sandy Will Also Receive Rental Assistance Extension

NEPTUNE – Governor Phil Murphy, Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, Senator Bob Menendez, Congressman Frank Pallone, and state Senator Vin Gopal today visited Neptune's Shark River Municipal Marina to discuss the State's plan to remove the cap on access to Sandy-related funds, allowing homeowners who have long been in limbo to complete construction on their primary homes. Additionally, those still impacted by Sandy will be able to get additional months of rental assistance. These efforts to support homeowners in the Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Elevation, and Mitigation (RREM) Program and the Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) Homeowner Rebuilding Program to the finish line were recently approved by the federal government.

"My Administration's goal is to get more funding into the hands of Sandy-impacted families who have run out of money and legitimately need additional resources to finish construction. Since we announced these programs six months ago, we have made tremendous progress for those who have spent years waiting to return home," **said Governor Murphy**. "Federal approval of our plan puts us one significant step closer to making this a reality. For the families who have yet to complete their rebuilding efforts, we recognize the difficulties you've endured. But we hope the actions we've taken over the last year eliminate the challenges that remain and demonstrate our commitment to helping all who were so devastated by Superstorm Sandy."

"The 1,200 or so New Jerseyans who remain in the state rebuilding program have been through hell and back again. Some were defrauded by their building contractor; some had to spend tens of thousands of dollars fighting flood insurance companies in court; and some remain paralyzed by the fear of dreaded claw-back letters," **said Senator Menendez**. "These Sandy survivors have faced many different obstacles. But at the end of the day they all share the same dream of returning home and getting on with their lives. Their marathon is not yet over but today the finish line is on the horizon, and the day they can return home is within reach."

"It has been nearly six and a half years since Sandy devastated our shore communities," **said Rep. Pallone**. "We cannot lose sight of the fact that New Jerseyans continue to recover to this day. This assistance, which will come from the Sandy relief package that I fought for in Congress, will significantly help to remove financial barriers for New Jersey residents who are still working to return to their homes. I applaud Governor Murphy and my colleagues in Congress for their steadfast support in this ongoing recovery."

"My Department's Sandy Recovery Division has ramped up efforts to help homeowners finish rebuilding once and for all," **said Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver**, who serves as Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA). "Throughout the month of March, we held well-attended outreach sessions about the additional funding in communities that were hit hard by Sandy. No longer will people in the RREM Program and LMI Program be limited to a \$150,000 grant."

"Thousands of New Jerseyans had the course of their life altered forever, and so many still deal with the impacts today," **said State Senator Vin Gopal**. "While we continue to fight for support at the state level, ensuring we hold Sandy-repair contractors accountable, I am elated to join Gov. Murphy and our federal representatives today to announce \$50 million that will go toward one of the most important Sandy recovery goals we can achieve: keeping New Jerseyans in their homes." Previously, homeowners in the RREM Program and the LMI Program were limited to a maximum grant award of \$150,000 to rebuild their primary residence. Because the grant award is not sufficient for some homeowners to complete their project, DCA requested and received approval from the U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to reallocate \$50 million of federal Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds to the RREM Program and the LMI Program to provide additional construction funding that should remove any financial roadblocks to a full recovery for these families.

Also, homeowners in the RREM Program and LMI Program who are in construction can receive up to \$1,300 per month through the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) while their homes are being rebuilt. The Murphy Administration successfully petitioned the federal government to allow homeowners to now receive up to a total of 40 months of rental assistance funded with CDBG-DR dollars. Rental assistance was previously limited by federal regulations to 21 months.

"Homeowners continue to work towards completing construction, but the financial strain of an additional rental payment can be the difference between finishing or abandoning the project," **said Charles Richman**, Executive Director of the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), which administers the Rental Assistance Program. "We at the NJHMFA are proud to help those families who were severely impacted by Sandy make ends meet so they can return home."

DCA allocated \$50 million to create a Supplemental Fund exclusively for homeowners in the RREM Program and the LMI Program who have a program-calculated unmet need and who have yet to complete construction. Awards from the Supplemental Fund will be uncapped, will be calculated based on the remaining program-eligible work needed to finish the project, and will take into account other funding sources. Homeowners who accept a Supplemental Fund award will be required to live in the home for five years following construction completion.

DCA plans to make applications for the Supplemental Fund available in early summer.

"More than six years later, struggling Sandy families need a lifeline to get across the finish line and finally make it back home. The New Jersey Organizing Project welcomes this lifeline," **said Amanda Devecka-Rinear**, Executive Director of the New Jersey Organizing Project (NJOP). "Both the extension of rental assistance and the creation of a supplemental fund create hope and options where previously there were none. We look forward to continuing to work together to make sure families don't have to struggle alone."

DCA's Sandy Recovery Division hosted evening and weekend outreach sessions about the Supplemental Fund throughout the month of March to packed rooms in communities such as Atlantic City, Brick, Little Ferry, Toms River, and Union Beach. Information about the outreach sessions and the Supplemental Fund was provided via direct phone calls and emails to every homeowner in the RREM Program and the LMI Program who is still rebuilding and who may be eligible for supplemental funding.

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