

DISASTER ASSISTANCE FOR IMMIGRANTS FEMA AID DOES NOT CREATE PUBLIC CHARGE PROBLEM

Q. Does acceptance of emergency aid due to Hurricanes Katrina/Rita mean that I will be deemed a “public charge” and prevented from naturalizing or that I will be prevented from petitioning relatives on a visa petition?

A. No. Acceptance of emergency aid due to damage or injury you sustained due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will not result in your being deemed a public charge. However, if you use fraud to obtain disaster assistance, it will negatively impact your immigration status.

Q. What if I am already receiving public assistance, such as food stamps? Will acceptance of federal or state hurricane relief aid add to my family income, possibly causing me to lose Medicaid, welfare assistance or food stamps that I am currently receiving?

A. No. Acceptance of state or federal hurricane assistance in any form does not add to taxable income and will not affect the federal/state benefits a person currently receives, including social security benefits or income-based programs, nor will such aid result in higher taxes. However, acceptance of food stamps, welfare assistance, or Medicaid may result in a finding that you are a public charge.

Q. Am I eligible for emergency aid even though I am undocumented?

A. All immigrants, regardless of status, are eligible for short-term, noncash, in-kind emergency disaster relief such as emergency food, shelter and medical care. Undocumented immigrants may apply on behalf of a U.S. citizen minor child for cash assistance through FEMA (Individual and Households Program Assistance) if they live with their child. You do not have to provide information about your immigration status, but you will need to provide the minor child’s Social Security number.

Q. Am I eligible for Hurricane disaster relief as a lawful permanent resident?

A. Yes. Only “qualified immigrants” are eligible to apply for all types of disaster relief. “Qualified immigrants” include: lawful permanent residents, refugees, asylees, persons granted withholding of deportation/removal, or paroled into the U.S. for at least one year, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and battered spouses or children with pending or approved visa petitions.

What types of disaster assistance are available to immigrant victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita?

* Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides temporary housing assistance, mortgage and rental assistance, and minimal home repair money. FEMA aid is administered through FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers in affected areas. FEMA has extended the deadline to apply for benefits to March 11, 2006. Failure to apply by this deadline may mean the loss of any assistance. For FEMA application assistance, call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362).

* Other Needs Assistance (ONA) provides money and grants for household repairs, replacement of household and work essentials, and medical, dental and funeral costs. ONA is administered through state Offices of Emergency Services.

* Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) provides cash income to persons who have lost their jobs due to Hurricanes Katrina and/or Rita. DUA is administered by the U.S. Dept. of Labor through state employment agencies. For application assistance call 1-866-487-2365. For Louisiana Unemployment Insurance, call 1-800-818-7811.

* Food Programs provide emergency food stamps and food distribution. Food Programs are administered by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture through state social service agencies. For the Louisiana Dept. of Social Services, call 1-888-524-3578.

* Independent agencies provide food, water, shelter, and medical aid through non-governmental agencies.

* Small Business Association Loans provide low interest loans to homeowners, renters, and large and small businesses to repair or replace damaged property.

* Individual and Household Program (IHP) provides money for home repairs and replacement of household and workplace essentials if a person cannot afford to pay back an SBA loan. IHP is administered through state Offices of Emergency Services.