



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

Telephone – Dial 311
www.houstontx.gov

July 13, 2021

The Honorable Al Green, Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigation
House Committee on Financial Service
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the House Financial Services Committee:

When members of the U.S. House and Senate approved an aid package in February of 2018 for the region battered by Hurricane Harvey, do you believe they intended for those dollars to be funneled to cities and counties least affected?

Aransas County and Nueces County, coastal counties where Harvey made landfall, received nothing.

Jefferson County, which endured the highest total rainfall? Again, nothing.

The City of Houston and Harris County, which suffered 50 percent of the damage from Hurricane Harvey? The GLO process awarded nothing.

This clown car must be stopped.

If the Texas General Land Office's process granted zero dollars to these localities, the process is demonstrably flawed. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) clearly defines CDBG-MIT aid as activities that "increase resilience to disasters and reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of loss of life, injury, damage to and loss of property, and suffering and hardship by lessening the impact of future disasters." These resources are critical to mitigating future loss of life and property in areas affected by one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States.

Rather than rectifying this nonsensical result, the GLO has doubled down and is actively misleading the public regarding their flawed process. The GLO initially claimed that their hands were tied by HUD criteria, blaming the Biden Administration. But as members of this committee know, and the press has widely reported, it is the states that exercise wide discretion over distributing these funds.

Furthermore, several projects in small, inland counties received funding despite scoring *lower* than projects in more populous areas on the GLO's own scoring metrics. In fact, a GLO spokeswoman explicitly defended this folly in a statement: "It is important that Texas inland counties are resilient as

they provide vital assistance to our coastal communities during events such as asset staging, evacuations, sheltering, and emergency response/recovery.”

This was news to people in impacted areas, who thought Congress had stepped up and allocated money to invest in devastated communities. It turns out the GLO has turned this Congressional investment into coastal resentment.

With bipartisan outrage from across the Texas political spectrum, the GLO has tried to mitigate the political fallout by retroactively requesting \$750 million for Harris County, further revealing the incoherence of their process.

Under what basis, guideline or criteria did the GLO decide to direct \$750 million to Harris County? The GLO is transparently attempting to salvage their willful display of incompetence by randomly awarding an arbitrary figure to Harris County, while setting the City of Houston adrift.

We, as a country, cannot afford to watch political gamesmanship play out while communities are left unprepared and vulnerable for the next disaster.

These storms will come again. We must invest in mitigation to create more resilient communities now. These funds were intended to safeguard people and federal resources by making localities more able to withstand these future storms. Instead, the GLO has elected to divert federal aid dollars to protect inland counties with small populations to the detriment of large population centers with considerable resilience needs.

The Gulf Coast is a regional and national economic powerhouse. Unfortunately, it is highly vulnerable to future storms and merits protection. The Texas General Land Office has abjectly mishandled their obligation to the U.S. taxpayers. They should be held accountable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston