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LACK OF AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING PRESENTS PROBLEMS FOR DISASTER SURVIVORS

WASHINGTON—The lack of affordable rental housing has been a major challenge facing survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and a vital component of disaster recovery must be repair of damaged rental properties, a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report shows.

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., and Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery Chair Mary Landrieu, D-La., requested the report, “*Disaster Housing: FEMA Needs More Detailed Guidance and Performance Measures to Help Ensure Effective Assistance after Major Disasters* (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09796.pdf>),” (GAO-09-796).

“It is unacceptable that four years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the government still lacks a proper housing strategy to help survivors reestablish themselves after a disaster,” Lieberman said. “One thing FEMA should have learned from the hard lives many displaced renters faced after Katrina is that it should spend more on repair of rental units. In the future, we must be prepared to provide more rental housing after a disaster.”

Landrieu said: “It has been four long years since the devastating impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita swept across the Gulf Coast, and FEMA still does not have the tools in place to effectively provide rental housing for those who were forced from their homes,” said Sen. Landrieu. “These people deserve better than that from their government. We must ensure that the lessons learned in the wake of these disasters result in better preparation for and response to the housing needs of future disaster survivors.”

The report noted that use of the rental repair pilot program included in the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, written by HSGAC, resulted in repairs that were 83 percent and 66 percent less expensive than placing disaster survivors in manufactured housing units.

It also found fault with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for having an ineffective National Disaster Housing Strategy, which was required by the Post-Katrina Reform Act. In particular, GAO criticized the strategy for failing to explain how FEMA should work with other agencies, not identifying alternatives to temporary trailers, and not addressing the need for additional resources to implement the housing strategy.

GAO recommends that FEMA develop a way to measure whether survivors are being moved into permanent housing, update its planning documents, and clarify its guidance to states on available housing options.

Lieberman and Landrieu requested the report as part of their oversight efforts on Gulf Coast recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In 2005 and 2006, the Committee investigated the failed response at all levels of government to Hurricane Katrina and issued the definitive report, "[Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared \(http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/creports/katrinanation.html\)](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/creports/katrinanation.html)." Since then, the Committee and its ad hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, chaired by Senator Landrieu, has held multiple hearings related to FEMA and tracking the progress of the Gulf Coast recovery.