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Representatives Israel and Nadler make progress on disaster relief in community associations

May 01, 2015 - Owners Developers & Managers

In the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY) and Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY) took on key leadership roles in pressing Congress and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to treat homeowners living in community associations fairly when it comes to eligibility for disaster relief. Community Associations Institute (CAI) is pleased to report important progress in Reps. Israel and Nadler's ongoing struggle for disaster relief fairness for community associations.

On April 15, Israel and Nadler successfully amended H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act of 2015, to help community associations access federal disaster benefits. The amendment, spearheaded by Nadler during a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting on H.R. 1471, directs FEMA to provide technical assistance to homeowners associations on how to access federal debris removal assistance and directs FEMA to develop policy solutions so condo and co-op homeowners are able to use assistance to repair storm damage to common areas.

Dawn Bauman, CAI's senior vice president for government affairs said, "Reps. Israel and Nadler clearly place their constituents' needs first. It is due to their determination and tireless effort that progress is being made to ensure all community association homeowners have access to federal disaster benefits."

During the committee meeting, Nadler spoke passionately of the importance of disaster assistance and relief being extended to community associations. Nadler explained the amendment serves "to address long standing ambiguities and eligibility for FEMA assistance, specifically for housing cooperatives, condominium associations, and community associations."

"The Stafford Act does not include a definition of condo or co-op. This ambiguity has led to significant confusion about the eligibility for assistance and made it nearly impossible for residents of condos and co-ops to make the common areas of their buildings habitable."

Nadler further told the committee, "The amendment contains language directing FEMA to provide community associations' technical assistance on how they may be eligible to receive reimbursement from FEMA or another grantee for their work in the aftermath of disasters. FEMA should provide these associations with best practices and support to ensure they are able to rebuild and continue providing basic services after a disaster."

CAI applauds the efforts of Nadler and Israel to bring fairness to federal disaster relief. Community associations often face alone the daunting task of cleaning up and rebuilding after a major natural disaster. FEMA routinely denies association requests to remove debris that choke roads and canals in communities after a major disaster. Condominium and cooperative homeowners are subject to arbitrary FEMA restrictions on the use of federal home repair assistance. Bauman said, "CAI will continue to work alongside Rep. Nadler and Rep. Israel, meeting with congressional offices,

providing key information to policymakers, and encouraging support for H.R. 1471. CAI members appreciate Rep. Nadler and Rep. Israel's leadership on this important issue."

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