

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

March 12, 2024

Dear Administrator Criswell,

On Friday, March 8, 2024, President Biden signed H.R. 4366, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, following its passage by Congress. Included in this legislation was S. 792/H.R. 1571, the Compact Impact Fairness Act, which amends the “qualified alien” statute under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 to include citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands who reside in the U.S. and the Territories under the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) – collectively known as “COFA citizens.”

This statutory change has been interpreted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to mean that COFA citizens are now eligible for FEMA programs, including disaster response programs like the Individuals and Households Program (IHP).

In Hawaii, we continue to work toward recovery from the devastating wildfires on Maui that occurred in August 2023. COFA citizens are very much a part of the community impacted by the wildfires, but have only been able to access assistance through non-federal pathways up until this point.

Given the extraordinary circumstances playing out on Maui and the additional extraordinary circumstances of statutory eligibility criteria changing in the midst of a disaster response period, we request that you utilize all available flexibilities to reopen the enrollment for IHP to include COFA citizens.

Allowing COFA citizens impacted by the Maui wildfires to be eligible for FEMA support will give them access to the most centralized and comprehensive recovery resources available from the federal government, and will put them on a more stable path to rebuilding their lives.

Despite being lawful, taxpaying residents in the United States, for decades COFA citizens have been denied access to the programs their tax dollars support. In a time of need, we ask that you use any means available to ensure they are given an equal shot at recovering from this tragedy.

Sincerely,

Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Brian Schatz

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Ed Case

Ed Case
Member of Congress

JM Tokuda

JM Tokuda
Member of Congress

CC:
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Mr. Robert J. Fenton
Region IX Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency