



STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
1 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0001

July 12, 2019

Mr. Michael Lee
Chair, Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program
Individual Assistance Division
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Mr. Lee:

On July 1st President Trump signed into law the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Humanitarian Assistance and Security at the Southern Border Act. This law includes a \$30 million appropriation to be allocated to jurisdictions or local organizations serving communities that have experienced a significant influx of people from other nations who, upon entering the country in search of asylum, were released from the custody of the Department of Homeland Security. The Emergency Food and Shelter Program National Board, which you chair, is directed to disburse these funds no later than July 31, 2019.

As you may be aware, last month, the State of Maine – particularly the City of Portland – received a significant number of asylum seekers. During a public discussion, an official with the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol explained that these people, nearly all of whom arrived as families, fled violence and persecution in their countries of origin, entered the United States through Texas, are seeking asylum, and were released into the United States on their own recognizance, at which point they came to Portland. Federal law requires them to apply for asylum within a year.

To address their arrival, Portland has converted a basketball arena, the Portland Expo, into an emergency shelter, which has served approximately 320 people to date. It far exceeds the State's current emergency housing capacity, which is geared for childless adults, not families which constitute virtually all of the new arrivals. Limited affordable housing in the Portland area has increased projected costs of serving this population.

The City – as well as surrounding municipalities, private businesses, charitable and faith-based organizations, local citizens, and many others – have stepped up to help meet the most basic needs of this population. In addition, the State has provided assistance through the Maine Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services, and I have authorized the use of one-time

contingent (emergency) funds to support longer-term housing outside of the Expo – the area of greatest need.

However, this funding still falls short of what it will take to ensure that these families are on a pathway to education, employment, and attainment of U.S. citizenship. Thus, as you consider a funding formula, I ask that you take into account not just this large arrival of asylum seekers, but Maine’s low income and high housing costs relative to other states. I am concerned that these factors will not be adequately considered if decisions are being made in accordance with information on a fact sheet on ESFP that states, “[t]he National Board provides EFSP funds to local jurisdictions (counties or cities) based on an allocation formula using the most recent national population, unemployment, and poverty statistics.” (See: <https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1532523209760-4943fdee1432ba47de17e2a9c5357502/mergencyFood.pdf>)

Moreover, this form of allocation is not consistent with the law outlined in new Supplemental Appropriations requiring that the Board “shall distribute such funds only to jurisdictions or local recipient organizations serving communities that have experienced a significant influx of such aliens.”

We stand ready to provide you whatever information you need in this process. Since much of the work is concentrated in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, its Commissioner, Jeanne Lambrew, stands ready to work with you to ensure the intent of the law is fulfilled.

In the meantime, I urge federal officials to take action to provide further support to states and local communities and to address the ongoing larger, systemic problems confronting our immigration system.

Sincerely,



Janet T. Mills
Governor

cc: Jason Owens, U.S. Border Patrol Chief, Houlton Maine
Jeanne Lambrew, Commissioner, Maine Department of Health and Human Services