

December 20, 2024

The Honorable Adrienne Todman  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street Southwest  
Washington, D.C. 20410

**Re: CDBG-DR Direct Allocation to Pinellas County for Disaster Recovery following Hurricanes Helene and Milton**

Dear Deputy Secretary Todman:

This letter serves as a formal request for a direct allocation of \$750 million in Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding for Pinellas County, Florida, for disaster recovery directly related to the severe damage caused by hurricanes Helene and Milton. As you are aware, the hurricanes made landfall on September 26<sup>th</sup> and October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, respectively, and devastated communities across the Gulf Coast of Florida. Pinellas County residents experienced unprecedented damage from Hurricane Helene due to historic flooding and storm surge. Exactly two weeks later, Hurricane Milton brought severe wind damage and historic flooding to the entire peninsula of Pinellas County, an already geographically vulnerable coastal community in western Florida.

Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused catastrophic damage to major infrastructure, homes and businesses across Pinellas County. According to Pinellas County data, 46,398 households in Pinellas suffered damages from wind and/flooding. Approximately 50% of the homes damaged from Hurricane Helene and Milton were considered major damage or destroyed. Of the homes damaged for both storms, 9,956 or 21% are classified as low-to moderate-income (LMI) households, which are now in dire need of assistance to repair or rebuild their homes. Tragically, 14 residents of Pinellas County lost their lives in the storms, and portions of the county remained without power and basic services for weeks after the event. For Hurricane Milton up to 83% of the county was without power. The storms also caused damage to critical infrastructure including roads, bridges and utilities, further exacerbating the challenges faced by residents. Our healthcare infrastructure was severely affected due to flooding and wind impacts. Only three of Pinellas County's seventeen hospitals were able to remain open to receive patients during the storms. Five hospitals outside of the evacuation zones were impacted by water main breaks and loss of water pressure and one hospital had to be evacuated during the storm due to flooding from historic rainfall.

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These hurricane impacts have created major barriers for affected residents to be able to return to their normal lives. Individuals are dealing with far greater risks to their wellbeing than imagined: families and children left without a safe home, emergency responders and local work crews adapting delivery of public services around major infrastructure damages, homeowners facing costly building and utility infrastructure repairs, and small and large businesses dealing with revenue loss and years-worth of setbacks. Considering these direct impacts and disaster recovery needs, we are requesting a direct allocation of \$750 million in CDBG-DR funding from HUD. This allocation will support Pinellas County's recovery and rebuilding efforts, including but not limited to the following:

### **1. Housing Needs**

Over 46,398 households in Pinellas County were damaged, with 21% of these households meeting LMI criteria. Many of these homes sustained significant damage, including over 20,984 homes that experienced flooding over 18 inches. These households are in urgent need of repair assistance to return their homes to pre-disaster conditions, or in some cases, to relocate to new housing. The county has estimated an unmet housing need of \$3.3 billion dollars, which includes funding for repairs, relocation assistance, and disaster-resilient improvements.

### **2. FEMA Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Projects**

Pinellas County's infrastructure was severely impacted by Hurricane Helene and Milton. Roads, utilities, bridges, and parks have sustained extensive damage, and the county has initiated several critical infrastructure projects to repair and rebuild these essential services. The initial local match required for FEMA Public Assistance projects is estimated at \$20 million for Pinellas County and \$183 million for all other governments, and there is also a growing need for funding to support hazard mitigation projects that will increase the community's resilience to future storms.

### **3. Economic Recovery and Small Business Assistance**

The local economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism, retail, and service industries, has also suffered major disruptions. Tourist Development Tax collections for October were down 28% in comparison to last year, almost \$1.7 million, and leisure and hospitality jobs were down 4.9%. The county is committed to supporting small businesses, many of which were damaged or closed due to the storm. The total number of businesses impacted by both Hurricane Helene and Milton is 1,119 with a self-reported estimated cost of damage total over \$135 million; many of which were impacted by both storm events. CDBG-DR funding would be a crucial tool in providing grants or loans to businesses to help them reopen and sustain employment opportunities for residents. The economic recovery of these businesses is essential to ensuring a return to financial stability for the county's most vulnerable communities.

Pinellas County has the necessary capacity to manage CDBG-DR funds. As an entitlement grantee, the county manages an annual allocation of over \$4.9 million in federal grants, including CDBG, HOME, and ESG funding and \$5.8 million in State affordable housing funding. Additionally, the county has demonstrated its ability to pivot to meet critical disaster recovery needs, having successfully administered over \$12 million in COVID-19 relief funding from FEMA, multiple FEMA grants including Hurricanes Irma, and Idalia; red tide funding; RESTORE Act funding; \$170 million of CARES Act funding; and \$189 million of ARPA funding. Furthermore, the county is expected in January to complete the process of procuring a nationally recognized disaster recovery

firm to assist in further developing our Disaster Recovery Plan and ensure that we can efficiently manage CDBG-DR funds.

We respectfully request that you consider Pinellas County's request for a direct allocation of \$750 million in CDBG-DR funds to address the ongoing and growing recovery needs resulting from Hurricane's Helene and Milton. These funds will allow the county to make immediate progress in repairing homes, restoring critical infrastructure, and supporting the long-term economic recovery of the region.

Pinellas County remains committed to working closely with HUD and other federal agencies to ensure that recovery funds are effectively administered and allocated to those who need them the most. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your staff to discuss this request and answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact Matthew Spoor, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Legislative Affairs at 727-423-9241 or via email at [mspoer@pinellas.gov](mailto:mspoer@pinellas.gov) to schedule a meeting or further discuss the county's needs and plans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to partnering with you and HUD to support Pinellas County's disaster recovery and rebuild efforts.

Respectfully,



Barry Burton  
Pinellas County Administrator