



January 9, 2018

Mr. Jeff Byard  
Associate Administrator  
Office of Response and Recovery  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20472

Through: Robert J. Fenton, Jr.  
Regional Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region IX  
1111 Broadway 1200  
Oakland, CA 94607

Subject: Request for Reconsideration for Individual Assistance to Santa Barbara and  
Ventura Counties (FEMA-4353-DR-CA)

Dear Mr. Byard:

On behalf of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), I would first like to thank the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for its support in recommending the President declare a Major Disaster Declaration for the December 2017 California Wildfires (FEMA-4353-DR-CA) and for all FEMA has done thus far to assist California. Pursuant to Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations Section 206.46, I respectfully request FEMA reconsider its denial of Individual Assistance to Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties. I am requesting FEMA reconsider its decision based on updated damage assessments for these counties and new damages resulting from the recent deadly mudslides in Santa Barbara County.

The Thomas Fire, the largest wildfire in California history, destroyed more than 1,000 homes and scorched over 300,000 acres in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. Although the Thomas Fire is 92% contained, its effects continue to cause destruction in Southern California. On January 8, 2018, torrential rain storms swept through Santa Barbara County, sending mud, boulders, and fire debris sliding down hills stripped of vegetation by the Thomas Fire. Tragically, the mudslides claimed at least 15 lives. Search and Rescue teams are working tirelessly to reach an estimated 300 people stranded by the mud and debris flow. Unfortunately, the destruction caused by the Thomas Fire and resulting burn scars is expected to continue throughout the duration of the Southern California rainy season. Based on initial assessments, over 100 structures have been destroyed and more than 250 structures have sustained major damage as a result of these mudslides. However, the full extent of the damages is unknown as there are areas that remain unsafe to access. One canyon in particular has up to 300 homes that remains inaccessible due to the depth of the mud. We will continue to assess damages as conditions allow, but we expect the number of destroyed and damaged structures to increase significantly.



Recently, Cal OES received new damage assessments for Ventura County. The largest concentration of damage across all of the December 2017 Southern California Wildfires (over 80%) occurred in Ventura County. Within the City of Ventura, the damages were even more highly concentrated. Preliminary estimates indicate that 55% of the residences destroyed or with major damage, 474 total, were located within city limits. Damages in the City of Ventura were almost entirely located in two neighborhoods, Via Arroyo and Hobson Heights, covering an area less than two square miles. The Via Arroyo neighborhood was particularly devastated with an estimate of over 300 residences destroyed or with major damage within a one square mile area. The Via Arroyo neighborhood also has the highest concentration of households over the age of 65, which represents 28% of neighborhood population. This is significant increase from the county average of merely 11.7%.

The rental and housing market in Ventura County will pose a significant challenge during the recovery process. Ventura County is in the top 10 least affordable rental markets in the country and only 25% of the county's population can afford a median priced home, which is \$875,000. The City of Ventura and Ojai, two severely impacted areas within Ventura County, had a pre-disaster rental vacancy of only 1.67% and .66%, respectively. The median pre-disaster rent was \$1,619 for a one bedroom apartment, which is in the sixth highest median rental cost in California. This number is expected to climb dramatically with the destruction of rentals in Ventura County. Given Ventura County's tight rental market, only 57% of displaced survivor households have interim housing for a month, and an additional 15% have solutions that will last no longer than 6 months. Ventura County residents are desperately seeking assistance for housing solutions. As of January 5, 2018, more than 582 households have applied to Ventura County for county assistance.

Ventura County's agriculture and cattle industry has been severely impacted by the Thomas Fire. A report from Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner Henry Gonzales to the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that fire damage to current and future crops, machinery and equipment, dwellings and other structures is \$171.3 million. This will impact over 36,000 farm workers who work in Ventura County and secondary economic impacts to businesses that support the industry. Additionally, the Ventura County cattle industry has been devastated by the Thomas Fire. Due to the fire's destruction of grazing lands in Ventura County, cattle ranchers will be forced to relocate out of the area. Loss of employment opportunities in the cattle industry will severely impact Ventura County's economy.

Tragically, Ventura County is not positioned to absorb the devastating impacts caused by the Thomas Fire, with 0% GDP growth over four years, -2.7% in 2016, and in the bottom 10% nationally in economic performance.

The Thomas Fire has caused extensive damage to residences, devastated communities, and as evidenced by the recent mudslides, continues to pose a direct threat to public health and safety. While some homeowners may be insured, many are underinsured for the fire damages. Additionally, most, if not all, homeowners lack similar coverage for flood damage resulting from the mudslides. The dynamics resulting from the fire and now the recent catastrophic mudslides have devastated families. Many homes have sustained major damage or have been totally destroyed, leaving families with little to no options for recovery. The Individual Assistance Programs may be their only option.

In addition to the Thomas Fire, several other fires erupted in Southern California during those same red flag warning conditions. On December 5, 2017, the Creek and Rye Fires began burning in Los Angeles County, and on December 7, 2017, the Lilac Fire began burning in San Diego County. Collectively, these fires destroyed over 175 homes and caused damage to many more homes. In San Diego County, the communities of Fallbrook and Bonsall were significantly impacted by the Lilac Fire. The percentages of these communities over the age of 65 are 20% and

26%, respectively, both well above the county average of 13.4%. In Fallbrook, damages were highly concentrated. Approximately 50 mobile homes were destroyed, which represents 43% of the county's destroyed residences. This Fallbrook neighborhood impacted was an over 55 community. Recovery will be exceptionally difficult given that senior populations generally live on fixed incomes.

I urge FEMA to reconsider approval of Individual Assistance Programs for Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, including the Individuals and Households Program, Transitional Sheltering Assistance, Disaster Case Management, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Crisis Counseling and Disaster Legal Services, and any other Stafford Act disaster assistance programs that may be appropriate.

Thank you for your concern and leadership during this difficult time in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark S. Ghilarducci', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARK S. GHILARDUCCI  
Director  
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services  
Governor's Authorized Representative