

# URGENT--UPDATE MEDIA ADVISORY

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**For Immediate Release:**

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## **UPDATE: PHASE II OF “PROJECT EXODUS” Mayor’s “Disaster Relief Fund” to extend hotel stays & deploy City’s Crisis Intervention Unit**

FEMA has informed the Mayor’s office and the City’s Crisis Intervention Unit that, as of 2 PM this afternoon, all of the people living in an estimated 25-40 Dallas area hotel rooms whose benefits were terminated on Monday have now vacated and, fortunately, made other housing arrangements.

Because of this new development, the focus of *Project Exodus-Phase II* will shift entirely to those people facing upcoming FEMA deadlines. The first of the new deadlines is March 1<sup>st</sup> followed by March 6<sup>th</sup>.

FEMA has identified another 244 hotel rooms/units that are facing the March 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

The Crisis Intervention Unit and FEMA’s Strike Team will begin working with the people in these 244 units to determine how many of these will be granted FEMA extensions and how many will need the assistance of *Project Exodus*.

The *Mayor’s Disaster Relief Fund* will pay for a 30-60 day hotel extension for these individuals.

During that 30-60 day time period, caseworkers from the City’s Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) will work with each evacuee on a one-on-one basis to determine both their immediate and long-term needs. A thorough triage of every individual, combined with intensive case management will allow CIU to create an action plan toward their independence.

Dave Hogan, Crisis Intervention Manager for the City of Dallas says “The critical situation we are most concerned about is the continued destabilization of these evacuees who may be mentally ill, developmentally disabled, traumatized into inertia, or

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experiencing overwhelmed coping mechanisms. The loss once more of housing may very well retraumatize them, and impede their ability to effectively achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. Rapid intervention at this stage will keep them from becoming homeless.”

Mayor Miller adds that assistance from the *Mayor’s Disaster Relief Fund* “will be offered with the stipulation that these evacuees participate in needed services. We will connect those evacuees to realistic levels of intensive case management, mental health services, and life skills training with the end goal of helping them become self-reliant.”

Monday’s deadline was the second of several deadlines set by FEMA to vacate evacuees from hotel rooms.

### **MEADOWS FOUNDATION FUNDING:**

In addition to a \$250,000 donation to the “*Mayor’s Disaster Relief Fund*”, the Meadows Foundation also awarded two grants totaling \$155,000 to the Mental Health Association of Greater Dallas. These grants were created to enable caseworkers to outreach and conduct hundreds of mental health surveys of hurricane victims helping to get them the appropriate care. Now, the “*Mayor’s Disaster Relief Fund*” will continue to fund these important efforts, extending the outreach to hotel families while continuing to serve families now living in apartments.

“As evacuees from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita sought refuge in Dallas Shelters, it became apparent that they needed both immediate assistance and long-term help to cope with the upheaval in their lives,” said Meadows Foundation President and CEO Linda Evans. “We are pleased that we could provide funding to the City of Dallas and the Mental Health Association of Greater Dallas to conduct initial assessments in area shelters, and to implement a case-management program for evacuees who may experience long-term post traumatic stress,” Evans concluded.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The “*Mayor’s Disaster Relief Fund*” was established on September 9, 2005 after the city identified a pressing need to move Hurricane Katrina evacuees from temporary housing at the Dallas Convention Center and Reunion Arena into more permanent housing. The City of Dallas, businesses, foundations, and individuals worked together to raise \$2.7 million to help evacuees with immediate needs. To date the fund has helped 771 families – approximately 2,900 individuals – with rent and utilities for 60 days. It also assisted in furnishing the apartments with household necessities, like furniture, bedding and cookware.

Because of aid from FEMA and the Dallas Housing Authority, there are funds remaining to assist with longer term needs making Phase II of the Project Exodus effort possible.

**\*\*\*A FEMA Representative is available for additional information. Contact Yvonne Gilliam 703-254-9291.\*\*\***