

**Subcommittee on Housing and Community
Opportunity**

**“Housing Options in the Aftermath of Hurricanes
Katrina and Rita”**

I am scheduled to testify before the sub-committee at the hearing, which will be held in the City council chambers of Gulfport, MS on January 14, 2006. The Organization in which I represent has not received any grants and we are not under any contract that deals with the issue in which I have requested to testify on.

My name is Rodger D. Clark, Executive Director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, Bayou Gulf-States Chapter. I represent Veterans with Spinal Cord Injuries, Disease, Dysfunction, and MS, that reside in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle.

I would like to thank the Chairman and other distinguished members of this committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today, on behalf of my organization, its members, and the disabled community as a whole.

Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, my organization went into the areas checking on our members and doing what ever we could to get Food, Water, Fuel, and Medical Supplies to those who lost everything. We found that we had 24 members at that time, who had lost everything and were living in make shift shelters, and tents.

I immediately contacted our National office and advised them of the situation, and the problems that we were having with FEMA.

I then turned my attention to FEMA and the Beck tale Corporation (who was responsible for temporary shelters) I started contacting them by phone and every call went unanswered. I then contacted WLOX-TV 13 and spoke to A.J. Gardina, who agreed to meet me at one of the FEMA trailer parks located by the Gulfport/Biloxi Regional Airport, and conduct an interview in reference to the lack of accessible trailers, mobile homes, and housing on the coastal area for the disabled. While doing the interview, we approached two FEMA employees, who were standing watching the interview, upon seeing us approach them, they jumped into their vehicle and declined to comment as to why the park had 56 mobile homes, 13 of which were handicap accessible and not the first trailer was occupied, keep in mind that this is now almost nine (9) weeks after the Hurricane and no one has been moved into these trailers.

The interview aired at 6pm that night and around 6:05 pm I received a call on my cell phone from a FEMA Representative located in Jackson, MS. He stated you wanted FEMA's attention, now you have it. What, can I do to help you and your members? I informed him of the housing situation or should I say lack of housing for the disabled on the Mississippi coast and that they needed to look into getting a universal design trailer that could be issued to any one, able-bodied or disabled in the area. I was then told to fax a list of my 24 members to Jackson, but the list had to include their names, FEMA numbers, contact numbers, location or address of the members, and location as to where the trailers would be placed. The next morning this information was faxed to them and I received a call that our members would be fast tracked

on the list and gotten trailers. I was then told that I needed to schedule an interview with the local networks and let everyone know that FEMA was doing everything in their power to address the issue of handicap housing. I was told that an average of 2 to 4 accessible trailers were being delivered to the coastal areas weekly, I then again stated the need for a universal design for the trailers and mobile homes, but my comments fell to death ears. I then contacted Congressman Gene Taylor's staff and got them involved with the issue as well.

I also found that FEMA and the contractor that was delivering and setting up the trailers were blaming the other for the lack of accessible housing and the problems that the disabled community is experiencing in the disaster areas.

As a member of the disabled community I felt as though FEMA did not care who got housing or when and now almost four months after the Hurricanes, the problem still exist. Someone needs to be held accountable and FEMA needs to step up to the plate, cut all the red tape, quite pointing fingers, and do what has to get done in order to improve the lives of all the disabled people in the disaster areas.

I also feel that the housing that is built, should also be built with the disabled in mind, both in the area of accessibility and affordability. But as I watch the news and attend town meetings, all that is ever discussed are new Condo projects, not the real issue that faces us today and that is affordable, accessible, homes, and apartment complexes.

At this time, I would like to again thank you for allowing me to testify and I am willing to answer any questions you have for me at this time.

I can be contacted at our Chapter office, the following information is submitted:

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