



**Congress of the United States**  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

August 29, 2020

John Bel Edwards  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 94004  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Governor Edwards:

I write to you today to urge you to open local shelters across Southwest Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Laura. The damage caused by this storm has caused an immeasurable and immediate need for local, community shelters in regions hardest hit by this storm.

While I appreciate that you have authorized the Red Cross to establish congregate shelters, the need for emergency shelter greatly exceeds the capabilities of Red Cross alone. Southwest Louisiana's community and faith-based organizations must be allowed to operate congregate shelters to meet the demands of this crisis.

My office has been hearing from many people who have not slept or eaten. These are people who have only the clothing on their backs. Most, obviously, have no internet, no electricity, dead cell phones, no water, no sewerage service, heavy damage to their home, medical conditions, no reliable car, no money for fuel, they're overheated, frightened... living in a nightmare. COVID-19 is absolutely not their paramount concern, and they cannot wait to be bussed to shelters in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, or Shreveport.

Further, community shelters provide critical care items distribution points. Water, MRE's, ice. They provide a destination point for volunteers traveling from across the State with truckloads of relief supplies and volunteer services and equipment. Chainsaw crews, bulldozers. Americans want to help. Community-based shelters are a critical dynamic of storm recovery. The Red Cross is the Red Cross. It's a huge bureaucracy in and of itself. We're glad to have them serving, but communities need clearance to activate their own volunteer services at community shelters.

I understand that the potential spread of COVID is an issue that must be accounted for, however, people without a place to go are at risk for so much more than COVID. I urge you to put aside your COVID regulations and allow local shelters to begin taking in people. These shelters are a historical part of Louisiana's hurricane response culture. It's a lifeline that many of our poorest citizens depend upon. The potential threat of COVID is negligible compared to the

need for life's most basic necessities of food, water, and shelter. It's unrealistic to expect these individuals to make it to Baton Rouge, Shreveport, or New Orleans, especially when they are now trying to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura.

Again, I respectfully request your swift action to open local schools, churches, and other shelters so they can provide immediate and local shelter for those who need it.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clay Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clay Higgins  
Member of Congress