

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 18, 2019

Mr. Michael Lee  
Chair, Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program  
Individual Assistance Division  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
500 C Street SW  
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Mr. Lee:

We write concerning the formula that will be used by the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) to allocate the \$30 million appropriated to it under the *Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Humanitarian Assistance and Security at the Southern Border Act, 2019*. This funding was provided by Congress to assist communities that are struggling to cope with the expenses associated with a surge in families and children seeking asylum in our country.

One such community is Portland, Maine. Since mid-June, an estimated 320 asylum seekers have arrived in Portland after a long and perilous journey from sub-Saharan Africa, through Central America, and across our southern border. Neither Portland nor the State of Maine have sufficient emergency housing to accommodate such a large group of new arrivals, many of whom are traveling as families. These asylum seekers are currently being housed in the Portland Expo, a basketball arena which has been converted into an emergency shelter for this purpose.

By law, these asylum seekers are prohibited from applying for work authorization until 150 days after completing their asylum application. This requirement, adopted in the 1990s, inadvertently places the burden of care upon the states and municipalities where the asylum seekers reside. Portland, its surrounding communities, and many individuals and organizations are pitching in to help meet the basic needs of these new arrivals, and additional resources are being provided by the state to cover longer-term housing needs. While Maine is a welcoming state, our citizens should not bear these costs alone.

Recognizing this, the *Emergency Supplemental* recently passed by Congress directs the Board to “distribute such funds only to jurisdictions or local recipient organizations serving communities that have experienced a significant influx of such aliens.” We note with concern that no funding formula consistent with this directive has yet to be announced by EFSP, even though the *Emergency Supplemental* directs the National Board to disburse these funds no later than July 31, 2019. Furthermore, EFSP’s customary allocation formula, as described in its Fact Sheet available online, is based on “the most recent national population, unemployment, and poverty statistics.”<sup>1</sup> Such a formula is contrary to the intent of Congress for the allocation of the \$30 million provided by the *Emergency Supplemental*, and should not be used to apportion these

---

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1532523209760-4943fdee1432ba47de17e2a9c5357502/mergencyFood.pdf>.

funds. Indeed, during the Senate Appropriations Committee mark-up of the *Emergency Supplemental*, Senator Collins specifically discussed the \$30 million as needed to provide relief to communities like Portland, Maine.

To ensure the equitable distribution of the \$30 million provided by the *Emergency Supplemental*, a proper allocation formula would consider other factors, such as Maine's high housing costs and low income relative to other states. We urge you to consider these and other relevant factors in developing the EFSP allocation formula, and we stand ready to assist you in obtaining any information you may need to do so.

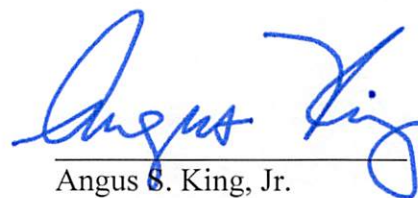
Sincerely,




Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Jared F. Golden  
Member of Congress