

Churches Sue FEMA for Discrimination After Harvey

FEMA refused to grant non-profit relief funds to faith-based non-profits.

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Three Houston area churches have filed a lawsuit against the Federal Emergency Management Agency for refusing to give churches access to its disaster relief program for non-profit organizations known as the Public Assistance Grant. Diana Verm, an attorney at the law firm representing the churches, stated, “After the costliest and most devastating natural disaster in U.S. history, the government should come to the aid of all, not leave important parts of the community underwater. Hurricane Harvey didn’t cherry-pick its victims; FEMA shouldn’t cherry-pick who it helps.”

It would appear that the churches have a strong case, as the Supreme Court’s recent ruling in the Trinity Lutheran case made clear that the government cannot discriminate against non-profit faith-based organizations. It was a huge win for protecting Americans’ religious rights, maintaining equal footing for faith-based and secular non-profit organizations.

One of the biggest and most glaring aspects to FEMA’s double standard is the fact that FEMA often uses church buildings for crisis relief. This is currently the case with Hi-Way Tabernacle, one of the churches suing the government as FEMA and local authorities are using the church property as a shelter and medical care center.

Churches should always be eager to help a community in need, but it is vitally important that the government recognize that religious organizations are legitimate members of the community at large. Excluding them from receive aid, especially after these churches have open their doors and have volunteered countless hours in helping their local communities, is unjust and only serves to distance people of faith from their government.