

Recovery goals pushed

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The agency created to assist Louisiana families after Hurricane Katrina is asking for a long-term state disaster recovery plan, financial support and better accountability, the organization's director said Friday.

"There is a reason why people are still struggling three years later," said Monteic Sizer, president of the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps.

The agency drafted its first legislative agenda this year to push for recovery plans that look beyond immediate assistance, Sizer said.

The legislative session starts April 27.

The Family Recovery Corps agenda includes:

- Develop accountability for using state and federal individual assistance dollars, which goes directly to residents' needs. Sizer said there is little documentation on how recovery dollars have directly impacted families. The agency will be pushing for a tracking system with similar to President Barack Obama's Web site that tracks the use of dollars in his economic "stimulus" package.
- Centralize long-term disaster recovery efforts. In 2007, the Legislature gave the Family Recovery Corps the responsibility of coordinating services between state and local agencies and nonprofits, Sizer said. But adequate funding for that task and the authority to access governmental information was not included, he said.
- Coordinate long-term disaster response across state agencies and work with the nonprofit sector. Sizer said many state systems have duplicate services. And after a disaster, state agencies are not prepared for the sudden influx of new clients, he said.

The Family Recovery Corps has the support of some legislators, Sizer said, though he would not divulge names. And the agency's agenda has yet to earn the attention of the governor's office, he said.

On the federal side, the agency is seeking:

1. More individual assistance dollars with increased performance measures. Sizer said the bulk of the money that Louisiana received from the federal government went to rebuilding infrastructure, not people.

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2. A funding system that goes straight from the federal government to nonprofit agencies working on the front lines. In some instances, nonprofit organizations can more quickly assist affected residents than governmental entities, Sizer said.
3. Changes to the federal Stafford Act, which outlines disaster relief, to better handle large-scale disasters, streamline the delivery of services and funding, and encourage hazard mitigation measures, such as construction regulations.

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., also highlighted the need for changes to the Stafford Act in a recent report on the failure of the federal government's disaster housing assistance program.

Sizer said he will reach out not only to the state's congressional delegation, but other states' leaders as well.

"These are American issues, beyond just Louisiana," he said.

Recommendations made by the Family Recovery Corps are being used by the National Commission on Children and Disasters, which was recently created by Congress to figure out who is responsible for long-term recovery and create a plan for that process.

Sizer said he is preparing for some resistance because greater accountability and coordination is not a simple request.

"I certainly want the dollars that come out of my check to be used in the most appropriate, efficient and expedited way," Sizer said.