

February 12, 2013

Alliance  
of Baptists

Re: Oppose H.R. 592, the Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act of 2013

American  
Baptist  
Churches USA

Dear Representative:

Baptist General  
Association  
of Virginia

On behalf of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC), a 76-year-old agency dedicated to defending and extending religious freedom for all, I am writing to express our opposition to H.R. 592, to be considered on the floor tomorrow, Wednesday, February 13. The BJC, supported by fifteen national Baptist bodies and hundreds of congregations and individual supporters, believes religion is best served when it is neither advanced nor inhibited by government. H.R. 592, which would authorize FEMA to provide houses of worship with direct grants of taxpayer funds, would flout well-established constitutional principles and harm religious liberty.

Baptist General  
Conference

Baptist General  
Convention  
of Texas

Churchnet

The First Amendment's Establishment Clause prohibits government from providing outright grants or similar financial support to churches and other houses of worship. Supreme Court jurisprudence has been clear on this point, having repeatedly reaffirmed the principle that direct monetary contributions of taxpayer dollars to religious institutions create "special Establishment Clause dangers." Simply put, we do not allow taxpayer dollars to build churches; we likewise should not allow taxpayer dollars to be used to *rebuild* churches.

Cooperative  
Baptist  
Fellowship

CBF of North  
Carolina

National  
Baptist  
Convention  
of America

The damage wrought upon the Northeast by Hurricane Sandy is an instance in which our moral and humanitarian instincts may seem at odds with the constitutional requirement of no-establishment. Happily, we have ways to empathize with and provide aid to churches and other religious organizations damaged by the terrible storm. Repairs may be financed by denominational efforts, private foundation grants and contributions of the faithful. Additionally, insurance proceeds are available for rebuilding efforts, and churches and houses of worship may be eligible to obtain low-interest, long-term loans under the Small Business Administration disaster loan program for damages not covered by insurance.

National  
Baptist  
Convention  
U.S.A. Inc.

National  
Missionary  
Baptist  
Convention

Natural disasters and other times of crisis serve as a call to action for citizens of faith. When we answer that call using voluntary, private donations, we reflect the very best of America's longstanding commitment to religious liberty for all. Public funding of houses of worship threatens to undermine religious autonomy and impermissibly involve government in the private affairs of religious bodies. It is simply not a good idea—however our heartstrings are tugged—to give churches access to the public till. H.R. 592 would do just that, and we therefore urge you to oppose it.

North American  
Baptist  
Conference

Progressive  
National Baptist  
Convention Inc.

Religious Liberty  
Council

Sincerely,

Seventh Day  
Baptist  
General  
Conference



Nan Futrell  
BJC Staff Counsel