

N.J. adds storm recovery aid for low-income families

By **GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press** | **Posted: Wednesday, March 26, 2014 4:48 pm**

Gov. Chris Christie's administration is calling for creating a new Hurricane Sandy recovery fund for low-income families who have not applied for money to repair damaged homes in response to criticism that storm aid has not reached low-income people and minorities as it should have.

The \$40 million program announced Wednesday is included in the plan the state government submitted Tuesday to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The overall plan details how the state intends to spend \$1.46 billion in federal money in the second round of recovery funding over which the federal government has given states broad discretion. About half the money is earmarked for housing programs.

The fund for low- and moderate-income people, which is to be promoted by nonprofit community groups, was the only major change listed in highlights made public. To create the fund, the state proposes giving less than originally planned to three programs aimed at local governments. The governor's office says the change came after hearing from the public at a series of hearings and in consultation with the federal government.

Christie's administration said full details of the plans would not be available on a state website until next week, when a Spanish translation will also be ready to go online.

Many shore residents and business owners have expressed frustration with the state's Sandy recovery operation, particularly its largest program: An oversubscribed effort to repair and rebuild damaged homes.

The state government has largely blamed the federal government for imposing rules that have slowed the flow of money to homeowners. The company hired to oversee the application process for the housing program has been fired for what state officials call "performance issues."

The Fair Share Housing Center, an affordable housing advocacy group, has analyzed data and found that black and Latino applicants for those grants have been rejected disproportionately. State Community Affairs Commissioner Richard Constable has said there was specific outreach to minorities and said the state is not trying to exclude anyone who is eligible.

Fair Share's associate director, Kevin Walsh, said it's hard to tell whether the fund announced Wednesday will be helpful until details are available.

"It seems that the state has acknowledged pretty fundamental problems and claims that the plan will resolve some of those problems," he said Wednesday. "The state's first plan claimed it would result in an effective recovery, and we know now that that's not true."