Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Rhode Island

Overview

The Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) is managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and is the primary source of federal assistance following a major disaster declaration. The authority to declare a major disaster is provided to the President under the Robert T. Stafford Emergency Relief and Disaster Assistance Act (P.L. 93-288).

The information below includes only DRF funding provided to Rhode Island as a result of assistance associated with a major disaster declaration. This information does not include other assistance provided through the DRF or disaster assistance provided by other federal sources, such as Small Business Administration disaster loans.

FEMA administers disaster relief through regional offices around the country. Rhode Island is part of Region I, headquartered in Boston, MA.

Major Disaster Declarations: FY2000-FY2015

A total of six major disaster declarations were made in the state of Rhode Island between FY2000 and FY2015. During that time, there were also three requests for major disaster declarations that were denied. The approved declarations led to $153 million in actual and projected federal obligations from the DRF. Actual and projected obligations are used throughout this In Focus to account for the total amount of federal assistance ultimately obligated. This funding does not include the assistance that was provided directly by the state, either as a cost-share for federal assistance or through the state's own authorities and programs.

There was a high level of variation in the amount of actual and projected funding obligated for major disasters each year, with more than $91 million in actual and projected obligations for disasters in FY2010 alone. **Figure 1** displays the actual and projected obligations to Rhode Island each fiscal year. The highest number of declarations in a single year was two, which occurred in FY2013.

Most Costly Declarations

The declaration associated with the largest actual and projected obligations from the DRF to the state of Rhode Island was for severe storms and flooding in FY2010. This declaration resulted in more than $91 million in actual and projected obligations to Rhode Island from the DRF.
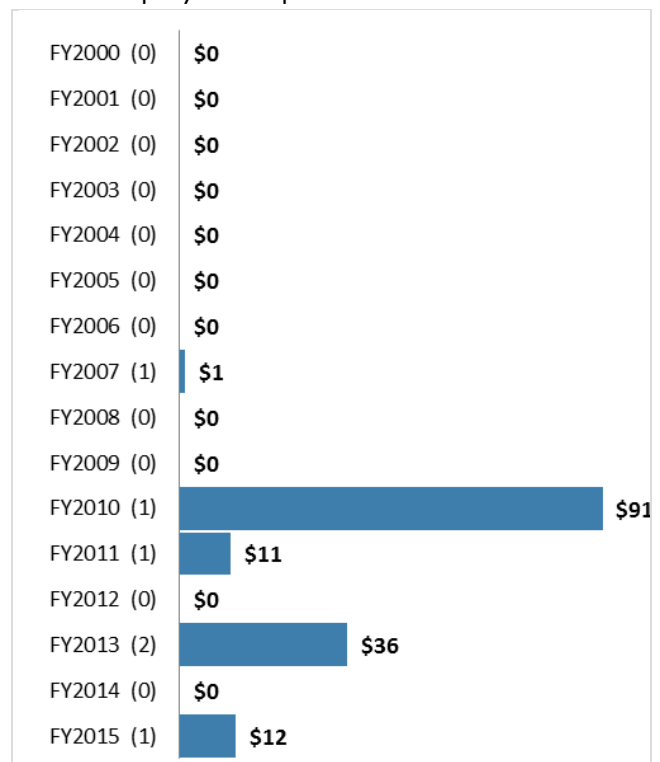
The next two most costly declarations were for Hurricane Sandy in FY2013 and a severe winter storm in FY2013.

Local Impacts

From FY2000 to FY2015, five local governments in Rhode Island received aid under major disaster declarations. The city of Newport received aid for the highest number of declarations during this period, with six.

Figure 1. DRF Actual and Projected Obligations for Declared Major Disasters in Rhode Island, by Fiscal Year

Figures are in millions of dollars, truncated. The number of declarations per year is in parentheses.

FY2000 (0)	$0
FY2001 (0)	$0
FY2002 (0)	$0
FY2003 (0)	$0
FY2004 (0)	$0
FY2005 (0)	$0
FY2006 (0)	$0
FY2007 (1)	$1
FY2008 (0)	$0
FY2009 (0)	$0
FY2010 (1)	$91
FY2011 (1)	$11
FY2012 (0)	$0
FY2013 (2)	$36
FY2014 (0)	$0
FY2015 (1)	$12

Source: CRS analysis of FEMA DRF obligations data as of December 2015.

Notes: Actual and projected obligations are recorded in the fiscal year in which the major disaster was declared. Only obligations from the FEMA DRF are included. Please consult the "Additional Resources" section for information on other federal assistance programs.

Types of Assistance Provided for Major Disasters

A major disaster declaration can authorize funding for different purposes, depending on the needs of the state. These purposes include:

- *Public Assistance*, which is used by tribal, state, or local governments, or certain private nonprofit organizations to provide emergency protective services, conduct

debris removal operations, and repair or replace damaged public infrastructure;

- *Individual Assistance,* which provides direct aid to impacted households;

- *Hazard Mitigation Assistance*, which funds mitigation and resiliency projects and programs, typically across the entire state;

- *FEMA administrative costs* associated with each disaster declaration; and

- *Mission Assignment*, which tasks and reimburses other federal entities that provide direct disaster assistance.

The decision concerning which types of assistance to provide is made either when the major disaster is declared or when the declaration is amended. For many major disasters, all of the assistance types outlined above are authorized. For others, some assistance types are not authorized. **Figure 2** compares the actual and projected obligations for different types of assistance provided to Rhode Island as a result of a major disaster declaration from FY2000 to FY2015.

Figure 2. DRF Assistance for Rhode Island, by Type (FY2000-FY2015)
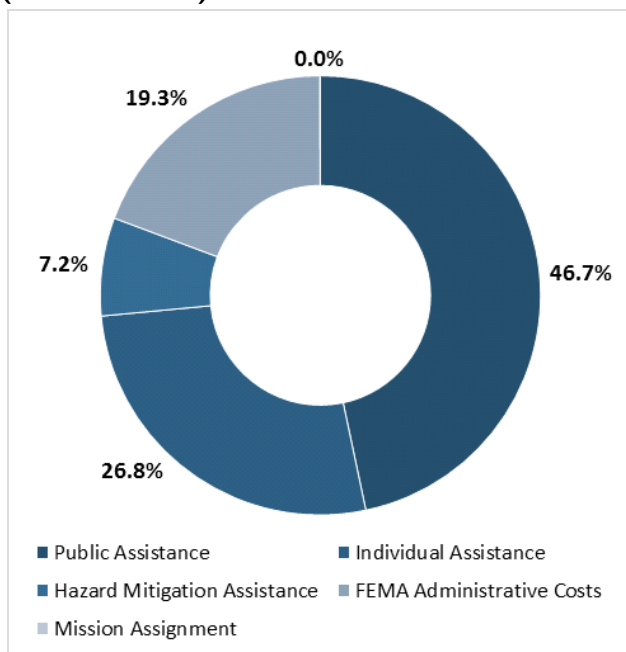
Source: CRS analysis of FEMA DRF obligation data as of December 2015.

Note: The specific assistance within each of the identified types may have changed in the period FY2000 to FY2015.

Other FEMA Assistance Funded Through the DRF

In addition to the major disaster assistance described above, there are other forms of assistance that are funded through the DRF. These include assistance associated with Emergency Declarations and with Fire Management Assistance Grants. The funding associated with these types of assistance typically results in lower obligation levels than assistance provided as a result of major disaster declarations, although there is significant variation across incidents.

- *Emergency Declarations* are often made at the time a threat is recognized in order to assist tribal, state, and local efforts prior to an incident.

- *Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAGs)* provide aid for the control, management, and mitigation of fires.

FEMA Assistance Not Funded Through the DRF: National Flood Insurance Program

Floods represent a majority of all major disaster declarations nationwide. One of the primary sources of assistance for flooding events is the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which is not funded through the DRF. For more information on the NFIP, please refer to CRS Report R44593, *Introduction to FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)*.

Additional Resources

Many existing CRS products address issues related to the DRF, the disaster declaration process, and types of DRF assistance. Below is a list of several of these resources:

- CRS Report R41981, *Congressional Primer on Responding to Major Disasters and Emergencies*

- CRS Report R43519, *Natural Disasters and Hazards: CRS Experts*

- CRS Report R43784, *FEMA's Disaster Declaration Process: A Primer*

- CRS Report R43537, *FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund: Overview and Selected Issues*

- CRS Report R44619, *FEMA Disaster Housing: The Individuals and Households Program—Implementation and Potential Issues for Congress*

- CRS Report R43990, *FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program: Background and Considerations for Congress*

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