

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 14, 2023

Important Information Relating to Natural and National Disasters

Dear Colleague:

The Committee on House Administration, the Communications Standards Commission, and the Committee on Ethics would like to take this opportunity to provide a review of the applicable rules, regulations, and procedures related to natural and national disasters. This guidance is generally applicable and not limited to any one type or specific incident of a natural or national disaster.

Question. May Members directly affected share information from federal, state, or local governments, or private entities involved in relief efforts coordinated by a federal, state, or local government through official channels?

Answer: Yes, if the Members share information to assist impacted constituents and not to help fundraise.

When a state of emergency is declared, Members whose districts are directly affected may provide constituents with information to assist those impacted. This information may include addresses and telephone numbers of entities involved in relief efforts being coordinated by the federal, state, or local government. In the past, Members have provided contact information for blood drives conducted by the American Red Cross in conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). However, referrals to organizations or links to sites whose primary purpose is the solicitation of goods, funds, or services on behalf of individuals or organizations are not permitted under the rules of the House.

In addition, although federal law and regulations of the Communications Standards Commission generally restrict unsolicited mass communications into congressional districts in the 60 days before a general election in which a Member is a candidate, there is a specific exception to permit Members to share vital information with their constituents in the event of a disaster. The Commission has determined that Members who represent districts affected by natural and national disasters may send unsolicited mass communications to their constituents, regardless of the blackout period. **Any such unsolicited mass communications must be reviewed by the Communications Standards Commission prior to distribution.**

Staff may not use their personal social media platforms to amplify messages from the official office.

The Committee on House Administration recommends use of these government established websites for information on relief efforts, as well as relevant state and local government websites:

www.usa.gov/disasters-and-emergencies

www.disasterassistance.gov

www.fema.gov

www.ready.gov/hurricanes

www.noaa.gov

www.nhc.noaa.gov/

www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/hurricane-guidance/

www.dhs.gov/

Question. May Members and staff use official resources to solicit anything for charities?

Answer: No.

Members often ask to what extent they may use their official resources to solicit or collect donations of goods, funds, or services on behalf of charities and other private organizations involved in such efforts. We understand the good intentions of those making such inquiries, but the rules of the House preclude Members from using official resources for any purpose other than in support of the conduct of the Member's official and representational duties on behalf of the district the Member currently represents. This rule has been interpreted to mean that charitable solicitations using official resources are not permitted. **Please contact the Committee on Ethics with any questions surrounding this rule.**

Question. May Members and staff solicit for charities in their personal capacities?

Answer: Yes, if fundraising benefits organizations qualified under section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) or with approval from the Committee on Ethics.

Although official resources may not be used to solicit contributions for charitable organizations or to imply that such organizations or purposes have been endorsed by the House of Representatives, Members and staff may solicit in their personal capacities on behalf of organizations that are qualified under IRC § 170(c), including, for example, § 501(c)(3) charitable organizations such as the Red Cross or Team Rubicon, without first obtaining Committee on Ethics approval. These personal efforts may not use official resources (including official staff time; office telephones, e-mail, and equipment; and official mailing lists). Other restrictions also apply. Solicitations on behalf of non-qualified entities or individuals are decided on a case-by-case basis by submitting a written request to the Committee on Ethics. For example, solicitations of donations directly for individuals suffering as a result of a crisis, as opposed to § 501(c)(3) charities assisting sufferers, would need prior Committee on Ethics approval. For more information about solicitations for § 501(c)(3) or other entities, please review the [Committee on Ethics' May 2, 2019 Memorandum](#), or contact the Committee on Ethics at 5-7103.

Question. May Members’s campaigns provide information for federal, state, and local government entities, or 501(c)(3) charitable entities involved in relief efforts on their campaign accounts?

Answer: Yes.

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) has advised us that Members’ campaigns may provide information for federal, state, and local government entities, as well as information for 501(c)(3) charitable organizations involved in relief efforts. This information may be shared on Members’ campaign websites and campaign social media accounts. Any questions regarding other local or community resources should be directed to the FEC’s congressional affairs office at (202) 694-1006.

What Information May be Listed on Which Platforms?

	Official Website/Social Media	Campaign Website/Social Media	Personal Social Media
Federal, state, and local government resources	✓	✓	▲ Members may. Staff may if not amplifying communications from the official office.
Non-governmental resources not for the purpose of fundraising	✓	✓	▲ Members may. Staff may if not amplifying communications from the official office.
Charitable fundraising	✗	✓	✓
Fundraising for non-170(c)s	✗	▲ Seek approval from Committee on Ethics	▲ Seek approval from Committee on Ethics

✓	May Include
✗	May Not Include
▲	Additional Considerations are Needed

If you have any questions regarding the use of your

1. Official resources in general, please contact the Committee on House Administration at (202) 225-8281 (majority) or (202) 225-2061 (minority).
2. Communications resources, please contact the Communications Standards Commission at (202) 226-0647 (majority) or (202) 225-9337 (minority).

3. Personal or campaign resources, or the loan of your name and personal title for charitable or fundraising efforts, please contact the Committee on Ethics at (202) 225-7103.

Sincerely,

Bryan Steil, Chairman
Committee on House Administration

Joseph Morelle, Ranking Member
Committee on House Administration

Michael Guest, Chairman
Committee on Ethics

Susan Wild, Ranking Member
Committee on Ethics