

**Draft News Release Signature Approval**

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**SBA** \_\_\_\_\_ **ComRel** \_\_\_\_\_

**DRAFT**

**CRISIS COUNSELING AVAILABLE IN 34 DISASTER COUNTIES**

JACKSON, N.C. – Residents of Mississippi’s 34 disaster counties who have sustained property losses and had their lives disrupted by February’s winter storms will be able to get free crisis counseling to help ease any emotional stress they are experiencing, disaster officials said xxxxday.

The state’s application for a \$000,000 grant to pay for 60 days of professional counseling services was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It will provide screening, diagnostic services and counseling for disaster victims at their request.

“Disaster stress is common when people are frightened, thrust into strange new situations and forced to cope with major losses,” said Linda Allison, FEMA’s Human Services branch chief for Mississippi. She emphasized that disaster victims are stressed, not mentally ill, and the counselors are not licensed therapists.

“People affected by a disaster often become anxious and confused by the sudden adversity in their world. We try to keep them from being overwhelmed and empower them to regain control of their lives,” said Allison. “No one who experiences a disaster goes untouched by it.”

The state may request an extension of counseling to nine months if the need exists. Children and the elderly are special concerns in the aftermath of a major disaster. The program includes community outreach, consultation and education. The state will determine where the counseling will be offered.

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**Disaster information is available on the web at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)**