

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 28, 2019

Hon. Phyllis K. Fong
USDA, Office of Inspector General
Room 117-W Jamie Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Inspector General Fong:

On June 3, 2019 the United States Congress passed H.R. 2157, now Public Law No. 116-20. This Act provides \$17.2 billion in FY2019 supplemental appropriations to several departments and agencies for expenses related to the consequences of recent wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters. Section 104 of this Act provides a grant to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico of \$600,000,000 for disaster nutrition assistance in response to a major disaster or emergency as provided by the Stafford Act.¹ This amount was designated by Congress as being for an emergency requirement pursuant to the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act.²

Congressional intent in designing H.R. 2157 was a swift disbursement of much needed additional funds for Puerto Rico's Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP). However, we are unclear as to why these funds have not reached the Puerto Rican people. Approximately 1.4 million Puerto Rico residents are participants of this program and nearly 45 percent of on-island households with children younger than 18 depend on nutritional assistance benefits.³ The emergency NAP aid approved by Congress allows Puerto Rico to bring its food stamps benefits roughly in line to those received by states on the mainland. However, because the funds have not been released, recipients in Puerto Rico have experienced benefit cuts of almost 25 percent.

We have read reports that Puerto Rico's Family Department, which administers the NAP program, has been unable to obtain clarity or guidance from the USDA as to how to secure this emergency food stamp funding.⁴

¹ 42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.

² (2 U.S.C. 901(b)(2)(A)(i)).

³ Javier Balmaceda, *Without Immediate Federal Action, 1.4 Million Puerto Rico Residents Face Aid Cuts*, available at <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/without-immediate-federal-action-14-million-puerto-rico-residents-face-food-aid-cuts>

⁴ See Arelis Hernández & Jeff Stein, *Despite new law, Trump administration has not given Puerto Rico emergency food stamp aid*, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/24/despite-new-law-trump-administration-has-not-given-puerto-rico-emergency-food-stamp-aid/?utm_term=.be9e38010d1a

Therefore, we respectfully request the Inspector's General office investigate this matter, determine why this assistance has been delayed and provide Congress with its findings as soon as possible. Thank you for your attention to this time-sensitive issue.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress