

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 8, 2020

The Honorable Dr. Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

At 4:24 am this morning, a powerful 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck Puerto Rico. Following the quake, a series of aftershocks have occurred. The southwest part of the island has been severely affected by these events. As of 1:00 pm there is one registered fatality and reports of dozens of destroyed houses.¹ Some government buildings have also been affected and a high school collapsed. Hundreds of small earthquakes have been rattling nerves on the island since December 28, 2019 as scientists described the island being “squeezed” between the North America and Caribbean tectonic plates along three different fault lines.² Dr. José Molinelli Freytes, a Puerto Rican geomorphologist, stated this morning that more aftershocks are likely to occur and may be potentially stronger than 6.0 magnitude.

Puerto Rico continues to rebuild following Hurricane Maria’s devastation, and must now confront the destruction brought by yet another natural disaster. Compounding these problems, the island still has not received the funds appropriated by Congress for the reconstruction of the island. As such, we write again to demand the immediate and urgent publication of a Federal Register Notice (FRN) detailing the administrative requirements for the disbursement of the \$8.3 billion in Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) appropriated for mitigation projects in Puerto Rico.

This request is long overdue, especially since this is not the first time that Members of Congress express concerns over HUD’s mismanagement of the FRN. Last August, nearly 30 Members pushed for the FRN’s publication to mitigate the impact of future hurricanes.³ Today, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) continued inaction puts at risk the lives of millions of American citizens. Nearly two years after enactment of the Bipartisan

¹ <https://www.noticel.com/la-calle/confirman-primera-muerte-por-causa-del-sismo/1156227958> & <https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/puerto-rico/nota/almenos50casascolapsaronenguanicaporelterremoto-1385615/>


² https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/puerto-rico-earthquake/2020/01/07/0cbe4c92-3143-11ea-9313-6cba89b1b9fb_story.html


³ <https://www.menendez.senate.gov/news-and-events/press/menendez-rep-soto-lead-bicameral-letter-requesting-hud-to-immediately-publish-disaster-recovery-funds-disbursement-requirements-for-puerto-rico-and-usvi>

Budget Act of 2018 (PL 115-123),⁴ it is unconscionable that HUD has failed to publish the FRN to disburse the CDBG-DR funds needed to help mitigate the potential effects of future disasters in Puerto Rico.⁵ In June, after more than 15 months of delay, the President signed into law supplemental appropriations legislation (P.L. 116-20) that required HUD to issue the FRN within 90 days, or by September 4th. HUD's failure to do so is a violation of the law. With the looming threats of more earthquakes and aftershocks occurring on the island, HUD must take swift action to finally disburse \$8.3 billion in CDBG-DR funds allocated for Puerto Rico.


Given the time sensitive nature of this request, please respond to this letter no later than Friday, January 10, 2020.

Sincerely,


Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress


Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator


Darren Soto
Member of Congress


Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

⁴See Section Sec. 21101

⁵*Ibid.*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Price". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being clearly legible.

David E. Price
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being clearly legible.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress