

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 25, 2017

The Honorable Elaine Duke  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Duke:

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, Puerto Rico endured a direct impact from the worst storm to make landfall on the island in nearly a century. People have lost their homes, entire communities have been displaced and families on the mainland have been unable to establish communication with relatives back home for days.

In an island that was already plagued with an acute financial crisis, the destructive passage of Hurricane Maria is another crippling blow to the people and economy that threaten its recovery. Unfortunately, Puerto Rico is without the necessary resources to self-finance its relief and recovery efforts.

One area that was damaged severely was the aging power grid. The local government has already predicted that it may take up to six months to turn the lights back on. While that may seem like hyperbole, to many Americans living in the mainland, the Island's electric grid was already showcasing its vulnerabilities before Hurricane Maria. Last year, technical failures at the Aguirre power plant left one-third of the population without power. In August 2017, inclement weather caused power outages for over 40 thousand people. Just weeks ago, Irma left over 1 million Puerto Ricans without power. A direct hit by a powerful storm was the worst-case scenario for the grid, and Hurricane Maria has now made that scenario a reality. Efforts to get the island back on track will be extremely difficult.

We are thankful that the Federal Government has stepped in and has already deployed its existing resources to ensure that Puerto Ricans affected by this horrific natural disaster are fed, clothed and housed. Every agency must act swiftly, in the way that America does when it faces an attack, natural or otherwise, on its own soil.

As Members of Congress, we believe it is our responsibility to ensure that the Federal Government promote the economic development of *every* community across the country. The people of Puerto Rico have long been denied the same benefits provided to other American citizens. Today, the stakes are just too high.

To that end, we are requesting two regulatory changes to expedite the delivery of essential supplies to the Island and provide the necessary relief for the local government to preserve its already limited financial resources so that it can provide citizens the essential services they need.

**Temporary Jones Act Waiver**

The Marine Merchant Act of 1920, commonly known as the Jones Act, requires that all goods shipped between waterborne ports of the United States be carried by vessels built in the United States and owned and operated by Americans.

The island is now facing an unprecedented uphill battle to rebuild its homes, businesses and communities. Temporarily loosening these requirements – for the express purpose of disaster recovery – will allow Puerto Rico to have more access to the oil needed for its power plants, food, medicines, clothing, and building supplies. Therefore, we request the Department of Homeland Security to provide a one-year comprehensive waiver of the Jones Act requirements for Puerto Rico.

**Waiver of Federal Matching Requirements**

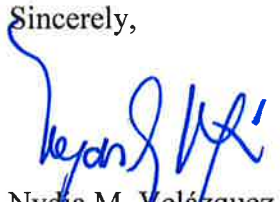
As you know, federal regulation requires FEMA to enter into cost-sharing agreements for recovery programs. However, Puerto Rico’s current economic conditions have already pushed the local government’s financial resources to the breaking point. Requiring cost-sharing during this critical time could take local resources away from providing the essential services many citizens need. We therefore urge the Department of Homeland Security to provide a waiver for any funding tied to disaster aid, emergency repairs and/or restoration.

Hurricane Maria has taken a significant toll on the Island, its infrastructure and its residents. The Federal Government has the duty to ensure these American citizens are provided the relief they need. By granting these temporary waivers, DHS can ensure we are doing everything we can to help American families in need.

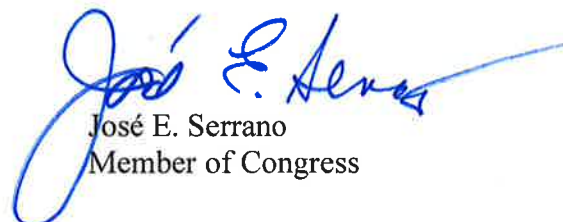
We look forward to working with you to ensure that the Island’s needs are kept at the forefront of any disaster relief efforts.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

  
Nycia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

  
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