

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 4, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations  
H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey,

As Members of Congress with a deep interest in and concern over Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, we write to urge you to include robust, comprehensive funding in the upcoming emergency disaster supplemental. The devastation in Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and elsewhere requires significant federal assistance in a number of areas to help these areas rebuild in the aftermath of Hurricanes Maria, Harvey, and Irma.

In the short term, it is necessary for Congress and the Administration to show a serious commitment to helping the American citizens in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands receive the relief they desperately need. While money to the Federal Emergency Management Administration is crucial in that regard, we believe that a more comprehensive and far reaching effort is necessary in both this supplemental and in the future. Towards that end we support the inclusion of the following items, which will provide immediate assistance to the people and governments of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands:

1. **Federal Emergency Management Agency- Disaster Relief Fund (Department of Homeland Security)** - FEMA is the front line response agency for immediate disaster response. Our understanding is that they will soon exhaust the money currently allocated, and significant additional assistance will be necessary for the Disaster Relief Fund.
2. **Community Development Block Grant (HUD)** - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Disaster Relief program is a key tool in helping develop local responses to needs on the ground after a disaster. After both Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, CDBG funding was used to help purchase real estate, repair public facilities, remove debris, rehabilitate and construct, enhance economic development activities, remove debris, assist with relocation, and perform other key functions that helped restore damaged locations. We believe that this funding should match the level of funding provided to FEMA in any upcoming supplemental.
3. **Community Disaster Loan Program**- This program provides assistance to localities who have lost significant revenue as a result of a disaster, and will need assistance to

operate basic municipal services. Significant funding will be needed to allow the territorial government, as well as localities, to restore their basic governmental functions.

Beyond these immediate concerns, we believe that there are a diverse set of needs that should be addressed as the recovery phase of this response occurs. All of the following Departments, agencies, and programs were funded in previous disaster relief efforts- like the responses to Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. As such, we request that funding be included in this, or in a future, emergency disaster supplemental for the following:

4. **Army Corps of Engineers-** The Army Corps of Engineers plays a key role in lowering future risk, performing environmental restoration, repairing damaged coastlines, and preventing flooding. Given the large scale flooding that hit Texas, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Florida, there is a significant need to examine and repair the damage to waterways, beaches, ports, channels, and dams. In addition, the Corps has previously performed long-term analyses to ensure that future-proofing problems are addressed in the repair process.
5. **Federal Transit Administration (Department of Transportation) -** The Federal Transit Administration played a key role in the recovery from Hurricane Sandy. We believe that a significant investment is warranted here in order to repair transit systems, facilities, and units in Houston, Miami, and San Juan.
6. **Port Restoration and Repair Assistance-** There is currently no ability for states and localities to use disaster monies specifically allocated for port repair. We believe that given the scope of damage to ports in Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, such assistance is absolutely necessary in order to promote the restoration of commerce and facilitate the delivery of aid and assistance.
7. **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) -** The FAA has received funding in past emergency supplemental appropriations to facilitate the repair and improvement of hurricane-damaged airport and air traffic control infrastructure. Given the damage to airports in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, such funding will be necessary to help ensure the full recovery of these locations.
8. **Federal Highway Administration (FHA) Emergency Relief Program-** this program assists with the repair and reconstruction of federal-aid highway systems. Given the amount of flooding in Texas, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Florida, funding for this program will be necessary to help repair roads and bridges on these highway systems.
9. **Small Business Administration Disaster Loans (SBA) -** SBA Disaster Loans are a key part of any recovery effort, and play an important role in providing low-interest loans to businesses, homeowners, and individuals in the wake of a disaster. Further assistance will be needed in this area to promote the recovery.

10. **Centers for Disease Control (Department of Health and Human Services)** - It is vital that funding be appropriated to the Centers for Disease Control to respond to health emergencies in the wake of Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey. Given the damage to the much of the drinking water systems in Puerto Rico, Texas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Florida, there is also serious risk of the spread of water-borne diseases like cholera. Additionally, with the amount of flooding that has occurred throughout the affected areas, the large amounts of standing water will aid in the breeding of mosquitos, especially in the tropical climate of Puerto Rico. There is a serious possibility that insect-borne diseases will proliferate, including diseases like Zika and dengue fever.
11. **National Park Service (Department of the Interior)**- the National Park Service has received robust funding in past supplementals to help clean up debris and restore areas under its jurisdiction. The Service has also been provided with historic preservation grants funding to assist states. We believe that similar assistance should be provided to all affected areas.
12. **Social Services Block Grant (ACF, Department of Health and Human Services)** - Funding for the SSBG was provided in several previous disaster responses, including for Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina. It provides states with a very flexible source of funding to assist vulnerable populations- like children and the disabled. In past supplementals, money from this program has also been allowed to be used to supply health services and construct, repair, or renovate child care centers, health facilities, and other types of social services.
13. **Head Start (ACF, Department of Health and Human Services)**- There is a strong likelihood of severe damage to Head Start facilities throughout Puerto Rico, Florida, and Texas- in Hurricane Sandy, more than 100 Head Start Centers were damaged. This funding helps to clean, repair, or rebuild these facilities, depending upon the need.
14. **Community Health Centers (HRSA, Department of Health and Human Services)**- Last year's Zika Supplemental including funding for Community Health Centers (CHC) because of their role in providing health care services in Puerto Rico. Initial reports are that only 10 percent of CHCs are operational in Puerto Rico, and the lone CHC on St. John's, which serves as the only 24 hour health care facility, has been impaired. Given the role CHCs play in assisting low-income populations, we believe that additional funding is urgently needed, given the damage sustained in all the affected areas during this hurricane season
15. **Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (Department of Health and Human Services)** - This fund assists the federal government in responding to natural disasters and the attendant threats to public health. It also helps to replenish the Strategic National Stockpile as items are used in disaster response, something that has occurred in the response to Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Harvey.
16. **Department of Defense**- The Department of Defense will need to be reimbursed for the cost of personnel, operational costs, procurement of equipment, and repair damaged

facilities throughout Florida, Texas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. In addition, the islands of Vieques and Culebra, which were part of a Department of Defense bombing range for several decades, were severely damaged by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. There are concerns that remaining ordnance on the islands (and offshore) may have shifted during the hurricanes, and remain a serious danger to residents. We believe that the Department should assess and complete the cleanup of the remaining ordnance as part of the recovery effort.

17. **Department of Commerce- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** - NOAA has played an important role in previous emergency supplementals in assisting with a diverse set of rebuilding, restoration, and reconstruction missions, including: fishery recovery and restoration, providing for the direct needs of fishermen and related businesses who suffered damage and disruptions, scanning, mapping, and removing marine debris, and repairing or replacing damaged facilities and assets. All of these issues will need to be addressed here as well.
18. **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Department of the Interior)**- The Fish and Wildlife Service plays an important role in the aftermath of disasters in repairing, cleaning, and rebuilding wildlife refuges and local wetlands to reduce the risk of future flooding. In the FY 2013 Disaster Supplemental, the Fish & Wildlife Service received \$68.2 million in funding for this program. Similar funding will greatly help the areas affected by Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey.
19. **Department of Commerce- Economic Development Administration (EDA)** - The Economic Development Administration is authorized to fund disaster recovery efforts under the Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) program. These funds can be used to finance public facilities, public services, business development, and technical assistance. Several previous disaster supplementals, including P.L. 110-329, P.L. 110-252, and P.L. 112-55 helped localities to recover from disastrous hurricanes.
20. **State and Tribal Assistance Grants (Environmental Protection Agency)** - There has been extensive damage to wastewater and water treatment systems in Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria, while the U.S. Virgin Islands has also sustained catastrophic damage to its infrastructure. STAG grants provide states and localities with the ability to repair and rebuild these crucial public health and safety systems. The Emergency Hurricane Sandy Supplemental included \$600 million in funding for this program. Absent such funding here, there is a real danger of water-borne diseases spreading.
21. **Leaking Underground Storage Tanks (Environmental Protection Agency)** - Significant flooding exacerbated already leaking contaminants from storage tanks and appropriate corrective action must be taken.
22. **National Resources Conservation Service (Department of Agriculture)** - the **Emergency Watershed Protection** program assists landowner and operators after

disaster to help them cleanup and restore their lands. This includes things like preventing runoff and erosion to relieve hazards.

23. **U.S. Forest Service (Department of Agriculture)** - The El Yunque National Forest in Puerto Rico has been severely damaged by Hurricane Maria. It is the only tropical rain forest in the National Forest system, and is a significant tourist site for the island, meaning that there is a significant economic benefit to a strong and sustainable national forest on the island.
24. **Office of Insular Affairs (Department of the Interior)**- technical assistance and Capital Improvement Project grants are for operating expenses and infrastructure needs in the U.S. territories including critical needs such as hospitals, schools, and wastewater systems.
25. **Farm Service Agency (Department of Agriculture)** - The FSA performs a variety of disaster related activities in response to previous disasters, which include: payments to farmers/ranchers who have lost crops and livestock as a result of natural disasters. Additionally, this agency administers two land related disaster programs, the Emergency Forestry Conservation Reserve Program, and the Emergency Conservation Program. The former compensates forest landowners for losses and the latter provides farmers with funding and technical assistance to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. In Puerto Rico, crops and livestock have been devastated by Hurricane Maria, and this funding will help farmers and ranchers find their financial footing.
26. **Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy & Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (Department of Energy)** – The Department of Energy plays a key role in grid modernization. Puerto Rico’s grid was gravely affected by Hurricane Maria and DOE should provide all available programmatic and technical assistance for the rebuilding and modernization of the electrical grid in Puerto Rico. It is particularly important that Puerto Rico's power lines be protected from future weather events, and DOE should assist Puerto Rico in analyzing the placement of power lines underground.
27. **Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations (Department of Education)**- the 2005 supplemental (P.L. 109-148) included \$750 million to Local Educational Agencies and non-public schools along the Gulf Coast to restart school operations, reopen schools and reenroll students. Similar funding will be needed to help Puerto Rico’s schools reopen and begin operations.
28. **Temporary Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students (Department of Education)** - In total, more than \$880 million was appropriated to jurisdictions that received displaced students as a result of the Gulf Coast Hurricanes- divided based on the number of displaced children who enrolled at each location. Given the expected migration of hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans to Florida, Texas, New York, and elsewhere, LEAs in those jurisdictions will need additional assistance to help enroll displaced students.

29. **Institutions of Higher Education (Department of Education)** - In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the various disaster supplementals included \$280 million in funding for institutions of higher education along the Gulf Coast that were damaged or forced to relocate. Several universities are located in Puerto Rico that will need similar assistance.
30. **Department of Veterans Affairs**- there are reports of significant damage to medical treatment facilities for veterans in Puerto Rico. Those who have served our country deserve the same level of assistance on the island as veterans in the 50 states receive, and we ask that funding be appropriated to repair all damaged facilities.
31. **Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID)** – Because Puerto Rico has close ties to several other Caribbean nations impacted by Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Harvey, we believe it is important that the entire region receive assistance to recover from the damage caused. As such, we believe that there needs to be an increase in funding to address the significant needs in the Caribbean and elsewhere.
32. **Nutrition Assistance for Puerto Rico (Department of Agriculture)** - Because Puerto Rico does not participate in base Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), it receives a block grant that is not commensurate with the need. Given the scale of the disaster here, it will be necessary to increase the size of that block grant to help address serious hunger issues on the island.
33. **Coast Guard (Department of Homeland Security)** - the Coast Guard has performed significant disaster response activities, and in previous supplementals has received significant funding to address these operational expenses. Additionally, some of their assets have sustained damage as a result of Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey.
34. **General Services Administration (GSA)**- Given the number of federal buildings in Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, it is likely that there will need to be supplemental funding to help repair and restore courthouses and federal buildings to working order.
35. **Public Housing (Department of Housing and Urban Development)**- Although FEMA is able to cover some costs, additional funding will be needed to ensure that public housing authorities in affected areas are able to rehabilitate or reconstruct public housing units to ensure that they have the same number of units as prior to the storm. FEMA funds are likely to be insufficient in this regard.
36. **Legal Services Corporation (LSC)** - the LSC provides grants to local services providers to provide assistance to low-income individuals who otherwise go without legal representation. After Hurricane Sandy, emergency assistance was approved to allow the LSC grantees to help with the specific needs of individuals impacted by that storm. We believe there needs to be additional assistance here so that providers in areas affected by Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey to help low-income individuals file insurance claims, find or retain housing, replace personal documents, file documents with FEMA, and address other issues.

37. **National Science Foundation (NSF)** - there has been severe damage to the NSF-run Arecibo Observatory in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and it will be necessary to repair the damage so it can be restored to operational status. This is an important symbol of our nation's commitment to Puerto Rico, and it should be restored.

We thank you for your consideration of these needs, and look forward to working with you to help all the affected areas fully recover from these devastating events.

Sincerely,



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