

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write to urge you to extend the Federal cost share for debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance, for the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) for damage caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. As you are aware, the 100 percent Federal cost share for these activities expires on or around March 15, 2018. Much work remains on the Islands, and an extension of the 100 percent Federal cost share is crucial to completing this work.

Under a mission assignment from FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been in charge of the timetable for collecting and removing debris. As of March 2, 2018, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and territorial agencies have collected 870,726 cubic yards of storm debris, while the U.S. Coast Guard has overseen the pollution mitigation and removal of 479 displaced vessels. Collected hazardous waste includes 5,950 bags of medical waste, 1,525 propane tanks, 69 pounds of refrigerant, 14,464 batteries and other waste products.¹ This is a substantial amount of debris over which the USVI has had no control.

This vast amount of debris has greatly exacerbated waste disposal issues. In fact, two landfills on the Islands were at or near capacity and, pursuant to a Consent Decree between USVI and the Environmental Protection Agency, were scheduled for permanent closure before the hurricanes. An extension of the cost share is warranted as certain debris must be moved off Island and this entire process has been outside of the USVI's control. The Territory should not have to pay a cost share because the Federal government did not complete its job in a timely manner.

With respect to emergency protective measures, despite the extensive damage and lack of power, the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority was prepared to begin work in early January and requested approval of a Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program at that time. FEMA, however, did not enter the request into its system until on or about February 16, 2018. Although FEMA has still not issued final approval of the STEP program request, the USVI recently

¹ <https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2018/03/02/six-months-after-two-category-5-hurricanes-struck-us-virgin-islands>

began to implement the program. As a result, the STEP program in the USVI is barely underway. Once again, an extension of the Federal cost share is necessary due to the delay caused by FEMA.

We strongly supported the recent extension of the 100 percent Federal cost share for debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance, for Puerto Rico and believe that conditions on the USVI justifying a similar extension. We urge you to execute such an extension without delay. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security