

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker of the House  
H-232, United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan:

On June 14, we introduced H.R. 6103, a bill to establish an independent commission to examine the Federal preparation for and response to the 2017 natural disasters in Puerto Rico. We write to urge you to ensure that H.R. 6103 is considered expeditiously and favorably by the House of Representatives.

While the 2018 hurricane season started June 1, many in Puerto Rico are still struggling to recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which struck the territory nine months ago. Our fellow Americans are still struggling due in no small part to the Trump Administration's failure to prepare for or respond to the hurricanes adequately.

Allow us to highlight just a few examples where the Trump Administration failed Puerto Rico:

- On September 18, two days before Hurricane Maria made landfall, FEMA had prepositioned two Type 1 FEMA Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) teams, two canine teams, one logistics package, and one Type 4 US&R team in Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, for Hurricane Harvey in Texas, FEMA established three Incident Support Bases (ISB) to pre-position supplies including water, meals, blankets, generators, and other resources, six US&R teams, and deployed mobile emergency response support personnel to assist with emergency response communications.<sup>2</sup>
- During past catastrophic natural disasters, the Military Sealift Command hospital ship, the USNS Comfort, has been immediately deployed. After the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a foreign country, the Comfort was deployed almost immediately and began

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<sup>1</sup> "Overview of Federal Efforts to Prepare for and Respond to Hurricane Maria." What Is Disaster Assistance? | FEMA.gov. Accessed June 11, 2018. <https://www.fema.gov/blog/2017-09-29/overview-federal-efforts-prepare-and-respond-hurricane-maria>.

<sup>2</sup> "Federal Government Mobilized to Support Federal, State, Local and Tribal Partners As Hurricane Harvey Approaches the Gulf Coast." What Is Disaster Assistance? | FEMA.gov. Accessed June 11, 2018. <https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2017/08/25/federal-government-mobilized-support-federal-state-local-and-tribal-partners>.

treating patients just 8 days later.<sup>3</sup> However, in the wake of Maria, when Puerto Rico residents were without lifesaving healthcare and doctors were forced to perform surgeries in makeshift operating rooms using cell phones for light, it took the Comfort thirteen days to arrive.<sup>4</sup>

- For reconstruction work, Puerto Rico requested a waiver of FEMA local cost-sharing requirements. It took the Trump Administration an unprecedented 43 days after the storm to authorize FEMA public assistance programs, and the cost-share waiver was not approved. For Texas, this same waiver was provided 23 days after Hurricane Harvey.<sup>5</sup> For Florida, this waiver was extended 22 days after Hurricane Irma.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that we cannot depend on the Trump Administration to accurately assess its abysmal response to Hurricane Maria and implement desperately needed reforms. Despite all the failures, President Trump has given himself a “10” and blamed Puerto Rico’s geographic location for the failed Federal response efforts. Recently, President Trump characterized his Administration’s actions by saying it “leapt into action to coordinate the response.”<sup>7</sup> He went on to say that his administration should be “very proud” of its work during the 2017 hurricane season.<sup>8</sup> Incredibly, he has not offered condolences for or even mentioned Maria’s 4,645 victims, as estimated by a recent New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) report.<sup>9</sup> The American public deserves better and the citizens who lost loved ones deserve answers.

After Hurricane Katrina, then-Speaker Dennis Hastert established a Select Bi-Partisan Committee on Hurricane Katrina to assess the Bush Administration’s failed response and make legislative recommendations for the future. A comparable effort is necessary to ensure the Federal government learns from its mistakes, improves its response and recovery efforts for Maria, and prepares to protect American lives during future storms.

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<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Navy Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs. “USNS Comfort Begins Work in Haiti, Prepares To Expand Medical Capability.” U.S. Navy. January 20, 2010. Accessed June 11, 2018. [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=50697](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=50697).

<sup>4</sup> Scott, Ernest R. “USNS Comfort Arrives in Puerto Rico.” U.S. Navy. October 03, 2017. Accessed June 11, 2018. [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=102710](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=102710).

<sup>5</sup> “President Donald J. Trump Amends Texas Disaster Declaration.” The White House. September 15, 2017. Accessed June 11, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-amends-texas-disaster-declaration-2/>.

<sup>6</sup> “President Donald J. Trump Amends Major Declaration for Florida.” What Is Disaster Assistance? | FEMA.gov. October 2, 2017. Accessed June 11, 2018. <https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2017/10/02/president-donald-j-trump-amends-major-declaration-florida>.

<sup>7</sup> Woellert, Lorraine, and Colin Wilhelm. “Trump Praises Hurricane Response amid Demands for Maria Death Toll Investigation.” POLITICO. June 06, 2018. Accessed June 06, 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/06/06/donald-trump-hurricane-maria-response-629512>.

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, Jeremy. “At FEMA, Trump Remained Mum on New Puerto Rico Death Toll.” CNN. June 06, 2018. Accessed June 06, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/06/politics/fema-donald-trump-puerto-rico/index.html>.

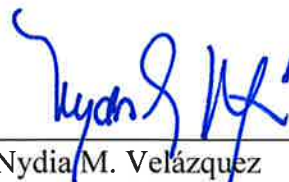
<sup>9</sup> Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria | NEJM. New England Journal of Medicine. May 29, 2018. Accessed June 06, 2018. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMs1803972>.

Mr. Speaker, in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria you stated that the U.S. government was committed for the “long haul” to helping Puerto Rico.<sup>10</sup> More than nine months later, the work to help Puerto Rico recover from Hurricane Maria continues. It is only right that Congress continue the commitment that you made to Puerto Rico. Again, we hope we can count on your support for legislation to establish an independent commission to examine the Federal response to Hurricane Maria. We look forward to your action on this important matter.

Sincerely,



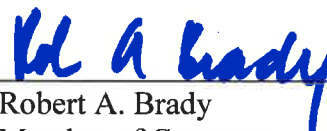
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Brendan F. Boyle  
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Robert A. Brady  
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Yvette D. Clarke  
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Elijah E. Cummings  
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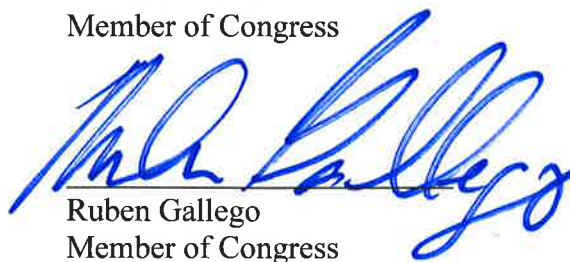
Rosa L. DeLauro  
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Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress

<sup>10</sup> Chavez, Nicole. “Puerto Rico: Paul Ryan Says US Is Committed.” CNN. October 13, 2017. Accessed June 07, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/13/us/puerto-rico-recovery/index.html>.



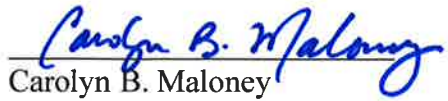
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Raúl M. Grijalva  
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Sean Patrick Maloney  
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Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Member of Congress



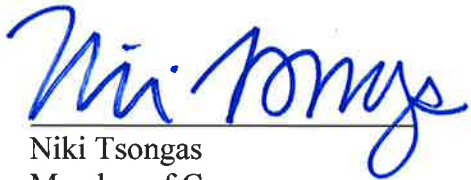
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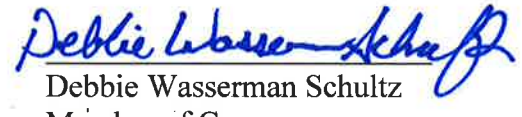
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Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



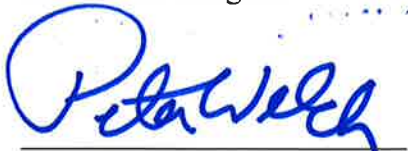
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