



One Hundred Eighteenth Congress  
Committee on Homeland Security  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

May 31, 2023

The Honorable Deanne Criswell  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C St SW  
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell:

I write in response to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) recent announcement that FEMA has reached a "\$30 billion milestone" in Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup> Since 2017, when Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused widespread destruction, FEMA has assisted Puerto Rico with its long-term recovery efforts and reconstruction of critical infrastructure. However, as you know, several factors have hindered Puerto Rico's recovery, including the earthquakes in late 2019 and early 2020, and Hurricane Fiona in 2022, which further damaged the island's power grid and vulnerable infrastructure. After 6 years, Puerto Rico has yet to fully recover.

Puerto Rico's delayed reconstruction is not only due to repeated natural disasters, but also because of Puerto Rico's limited capacity to manage disaster recovery programs and FEMA's difficulty in reaching an agreement with grant applicants on the scope of each project.<sup>2</sup> As a result, a report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirmed that: "the recovery from Hurricanes Irma and Maria has been the largest and most complicated in our nation's history."<sup>3</sup>

Further, last year, the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a report on FEMA's mismanagement of the Puerto Rico Disaster Case Management Program (PR-DCMP) and ultimately concluded that FEMA violated Federal regulations and did not comply with the agency's own internal guidelines.<sup>4</sup> As a result, millions of dollars were improperly accounted for, which increased the risk for fraud, waste, and abuse.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *FEMA Reaches Historic \$30 Billion Milestone for the Recovery of Puerto Rico*. FEMA. (April 16, 2023). <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20230417/fema-reaches-historic-30-billion-milestone-recovery-puerto-rico>.

<sup>2</sup> *Hurricane Recovery Can Take Years—But For Puerto Rico, 5 Years Show Its Unique Challenges*. GAO. (November 14, 2022). <https://www.gao.gov/blog/hurricane-recovery-can-take-years-puerto-rico-5-years-show-its-unique-challenges>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, OIG-22-77, FEMA DID NOT EFFECTIVELY MANAGE DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FUNDS IN SUPPORT OF HURRICANE MARIA RECOVERY SERVICES 3 (September 29, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

While I support Puerto Rico's continued reconstruction efforts and long-term resiliency, I remain concerned about FEMA's ability to manage the 10,600 infrastructure projects represented in the \$30 billion in obligated Public Assistance funds. As of May 22, 2023, only \$7.2 billion in Public Assistance funds have been disbursed to grant applicants.<sup>6</sup> Considering FEMA's previous challenges on the island, it is important that FEMA learns from its mistakes to ensure that federal funds are fully accounted for and that infrastructure projects are completed in a timely manner.

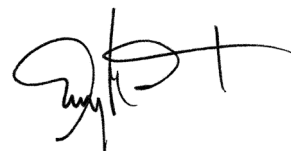
As a Member of Congress, and the Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology, I am responsible for overseeing FEMA's stewardship of its time and resources. It is imperative that progress is being made, that community resiliency is being improved, and that Puerto Rico is prepared to withstand the next hurricane season. As such, I strongly encourage FEMA to safeguard federal funds and implement internal controls as the agency oversees reconstruction projects in Puerto Rico.

I ask that FEMA provide the following information by June 30, 2023:

1. An estimated timeline for existing reconstruction projects to be completed in Puerto Rico.
2. An assessment of Puerto Rico's vulnerabilities during the next hurricane season due to unfinished recovery and reconstruction projects.
3. FEMA's plans to safeguard federal funds, including a description of any changes that have been made following the recommendations made by the GAO and the OIG.

Please contact Elizabeth White on the Committee staff at (202) 226-8417 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



ANTHONY D'ESPOSITO  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Emergency  
Management and Technology

---

<sup>6</sup> *Financial Summary*. Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3). (May 22, 2023)  
<https://recovery.pr.gov/en/financial-analysis/financial-summary>.