Housing Victims of Major Disasters Act of 2018

The Housing Victims of Major Disasters Act helps displaced survivors of major natural disasters get back on their feet by requiring the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to activate an existing program that transitions survivors into stable housing. The Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) provides subsidies that help survivors pay rent, put down a security deposit, or pay for utilities - support that is critical as they work to establish themselves in their new communities. The program has been used by Presidents of both parties in the aftermath of disasters. It was a tool employed after Hurricanes Rita, Gustav, Ike, and Sandy.

DHAP is a partnership between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and FEMA. Under current law, FEMA and HUD must enter into an agreement about the terms of the program for each disaster. FEMA has full discretion over whether to initiate the process. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, HUD has publicly expressed its willingness to launch the program but FEMA has refused despite requests from the Governor of Puerto Rico and Members of Congress. This failure to act has left the more than 2,300 evacuee families still in temporary housing on the mainland in danger of being homeless when FEMA's short-term housing program ends on June 30th.

The Housing Victims of Major Disasters Act ensures that survivors of Hurricane Maria and future disasters have access to the support they need by:

- Requiring FEMA to work with HUD to set up the Disaster Housing Assistance Program for survivors of Hurricane Maria within 15 day of the passage of the bill.

- Requiring FEMA and HUD to consult about standing up the DHAP program within 60 days after any future presidential disaster declaration.

- Ensuring that survivors who lacked formal legal documentation of ownership or right to occupy their home prior to the disaster can use alternative proof to get access to disaster assistance.

- Allowing survivors of Hurricane Maria to use disaster funding to gain title to their land, which is critical since more than half of Puerto Rico's houses are informal.

This bill has been endorsed by the Hispanic Federation, Oxfam, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, the Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition and the American Federation of Teachers.

The legislation is the Senate companion to H.R. 5474, introduced by Congressman Adriano Espaillat (D–N.Y.), Congresswoman Jenniffer González-Colón (R–P.R.), and 16 other cosponsors.