

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 27, 2018

The Honorable Brock Long
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Administrator Long and Secretary Carson,

We write to urge you to immediately extend the June 30th deadline for the Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) Program and to activate the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP).

1,667 families are currently reliant on Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) and FEMA's May 14th deadline was extended to June 30th so that children could finish the school year before returning to Puerto Rico. We were grateful for FEMA's prioritization of child welfare, but are extremely disappointed that this concern has since been abandoned. While the looming June 30th deadline will get families back to Puerto Rico in time for the start of the school year, the Department of Education has had to close 263 schools throughout the island and these schools will remain closed for the duration of the 2018-2019 school year. FEMA's June 30th TSA deadline is forcing families to return to Puerto Rico before they have a home or school to return to and we will not stand for it. And while extension of the looming June 30th TSA deadline is our top priority, we also recognize the dire need for long-term solutions to the Puerto Rican housing crisis.

After more than eight months since the first hurricane made landfall in Puerto Rico, FEMA and HUD have neglected to address the long-term housing needs of survivors. Hurricanes Irma and Maria destroyed nearly 90,000 Puerto Rican homes and the assistance provided by FEMA and HUD has not amply addressed the island's vast infrastructural devastation. Puerto Rico's sensible request for \$46 billion in aid to "restore housing and economic viability"¹ was met with \$18.5 billion in HUD grants,² 60 percent of the thousands of Puerto Rican families who applied for individual assistance through FEMA were outright denied³, and those lucky enough to receive assistance were allocated a mere \$2,974 on average.⁴

Ensuring that all of Hurricane Maria's survivors can secure a safe and affordable place to call home as they begin to rebuild their communities is critical, and for that, we call upon you to activate the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP).

¹<http://www.p3.pr.gov/assets/rfp-2018-005-disaster-recovery-energy-mission.pdf>

²https://www.hud.gov/states/puerto_rico_virgin_islands/news/HUDNo_2018-04-10

³<https://www.npr.org/2018/03/20/595240841/unable-to-prove-they-own-their-homes-puerto-ricans-denied-fema-help>

⁴<https://hbr.org/2018/06/what-hurricane-marias-death-toll-reveals-about-health-care-in-puerto-rico>

Most recently, FEMA rejected a formal request for the implementation of DHAP from Puerto Rico's Governor Ricardo Rossello in December of 2017. The agency's decision to ignore that request forced families to either double or even triple up with other families, or spend more than half of their income on rent, requiring survivors to rely more heavily on government assistance programs to cover the cost of health care and other necessities.⁵

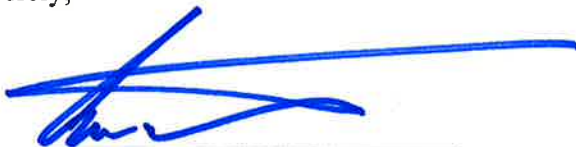
The financial strain resulting from a lack of affordable housing has already begun to force families into homelessness and as more Puerto Ricans return home, these numbers will undoubtedly rise.⁶

DHAP was activated after Hurricane Katrina and was also used to assist survivors of Superstorm Sandy and Hurricanes Ike, Rita, and Gustav. Even more troubling is the fact that DHAP has historically been activated within two weeks of a disaster, while Puerto Ricans have waited over eight months for relief. American citizens deserve better and it is our duty to provide them with reliable, accessible, and affordable solutions. While we recognize that FEMA is referring survivors to existing HUD programs, waitlists for such assistance can be years long and do not provide many of the services that DHAP alone can provide to victims.⁷

The people of Puerto Rico have faced enough tragedy and providing safe, affordable housing is the least we can do for our citizens in need. FEMA's June 30th deadline for the TSA program and the failure to activate DHAP is detrimental to the wellbeing of the same families these organization are trying to protect.

Activate DHAP, extend the June 30th deadline, and help heal Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
United States Representative
New York 13th District



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Nydia M. Velázquez
United States Representative
New York 7th District



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator
New York

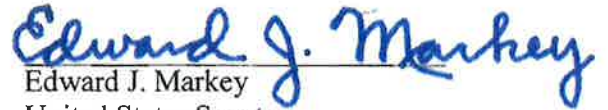
⁵ <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-fema-ignores-housing-option-for-displaced-families-20180420-story.html>

⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/puerto-rico-crisis/2-300-puerto-rican-families-displaced-hurricane-maria-are-about-n880356>

⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/20/politics/sutter-puerto-rico-motel-misery-invs/index.html>



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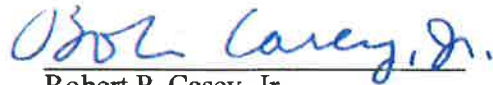
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United States Representative
Arizona 3rd District



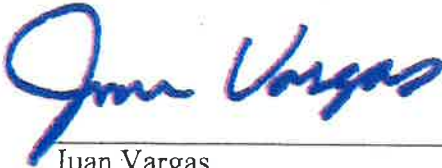
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