

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 26, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Speaker Ryan:

We write to request that the Senate and House begin immediate consideration of a supplemental appropriations bill to provide relief for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the wake Hurricane Irma and now Hurricane Maria. Specifically, we are asking that additional funds be provided to ensure an adequate balance in FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), and Community Development Block Grants for disaster recovery (CDBG-DR) along with other disaster relief accounts be authorized and funded to respond to this catastrophe.

It has now been six days since Hurricane Maria ravaged the islands of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This comes just two weeks after Hurricane Irma wreaked havoc on the area that is home to more than 3.5 million United States citizens. These storms have been some of the most powerful hurricanes in recorded history to affect the region, leaving thousands of families homeless, causing catastrophic damage to critical infrastructure, and leaving much of their population without power for an indefinite period of time. Most tragically of all, these storms have claimed several lives and threaten to take many more if urgent action is not taken immediately.

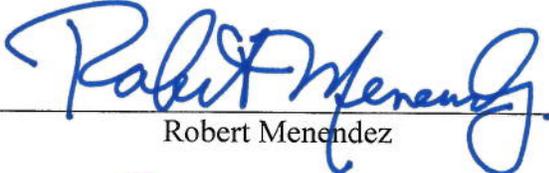
While many areas across the island have lost communication to the outside world, making it difficult to evaluate the full extent of the devastation, one thing we know for certain is that Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands recovery will require a strong, sustained, and long-term commitment. In Puerto Rico, the Trump Administration approved a disaster declaration for 54 of the 78 municipalities on the island, which would only allow parts of the affected population to receive aid from FEMA. Unfortunately, this falls far short of the actual needs of an island that was devastated end-to-end. In particular, the extensive damage to the Guajataca Dam in northwest Puerto Rico is threatening tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans that reside in municipalities not included in the disaster declaration. The potential complete failure of the dam demands all necessary resources to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the nearby communities. The U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands demand immediate action and additional funding as the recoveries from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma continue to draw on an already strained DRF.

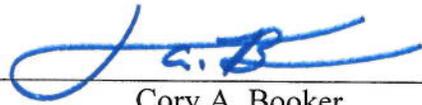
Beyond FEMA assistance, aid in the form of CDBG-DR is necessary to help the citizens living in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands recover from Hurricane Maria and Irma. CDBG-DR funding will enable Puerto Rico and its local municipalities, as well as the U.S.

Virgin Islands to help rebuild homes, provide temporary housing, and repair vital infrastructure. As members of Congress, we have an obligation to ensure all citizens of the United States affected by natural disasters have sufficient resources to recover. Congress can and should come together to help our fellow Americans recover just like it has in past disasters. Without this crucial funding, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Island's schools, businesses, and critical infrastructure will be left vulnerable to further deterioration, only prolonging an already challenging road to recovery and adding to human suffering.

The American citizens who reside in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have served in our military and fought for our country since its inception. They answered the call every time their country needed them – and now, it is our obligation to be there for them. We appreciate your consideration of our request, and we look forward to working with you to provide assistance to victims of Hurricanes Maria and Irma.

Sincerely,


Robert Menendez


Cory A. Booker


Charles E. Schumer


Kirsten Gillibrand


Edward J. Markey


Elizabeth Warren


Richard J. Durbin


Tammy Duckworth


Richard Blumenthal


Sherrod Brown


Robert P. Casey, Jr.