

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 3, 2017

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Trump:

We write to ask that you send sufficient aid and relief personnel to the Puerto Rican islands of Vieques and Culebra as soon as possible. Thousands of lives are at stake. We remain deeply concerned about the entire relief and recovery effort taking place in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The situations on Vieques and Culebra are especially worrisome. We ask that you ensure these islands receive higher priority than they have thus far.

Vieques and Culebra are home to thousands of United States citizens. The islands' remoteness undoubtedly complicates relief efforts, which makes it even more important in this time of need that we let the two municipalities know, through action, that they are not forgotten. Vieques and Culebra were initially hit by Hurricane Irma before Hurricane Maria dealt the islands another devastating blow.

Communication from Vieques and Culebra is limited, but reports from news outlets, as well as from relatives and friends of people on the islands, are profoundly worrying. For example, as of Thursday, Vieques had "been without running water, power, gasoline or communications for more than a week," according to one dispatch from the island, "leaving its 9,000 residents teetering on the edge of crisis and clamoring for help."<sup>1</sup>

There is also urgent concern about the state of the superfund site on Vieques. For decades, the islands were used for U.S. Navy bombing exercises and live-fire training, which left thousands of acres contaminated with heavy metals and toxic chemicals used by our military.<sup>2</sup> We share the concern of residents that the hazardous waste may further contaminate the island and water supplies, and ultimately threaten the health of local residents. Additionally, the superfund site contains unexploded bombs and live ammunition that could be washed into the sea, posing long-

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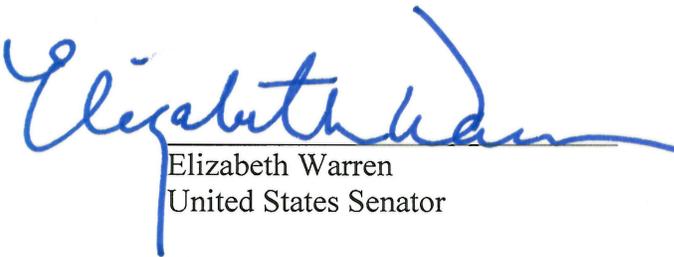
<sup>1</sup> Amy Gordon, "On Vieques, 'primitive' takes on a new meaning," Washington Post, Sept. 28, 2017, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/amphtml/national/on-vieques-primitive-takes-on-a-new-meaning/2017/09/28/adf0532a-a3b6-11e7-b14f-f41773cd5a14story.html>).

<sup>2</sup> Valeria Pelet, "Puerto Rico's Invisible Health Crisis," The Atlantic, Sept. 3, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/vieques-invisible-health-crisis/498428/>.

term health and safety risks.<sup>3</sup> Careful monitoring of the Vieques superfund site – and all of Puerto Rico’s superfund sites – must be a top priority for the federal government.

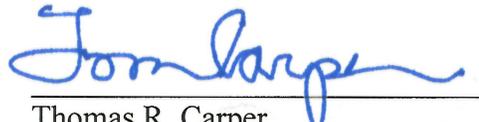
The residents of Vieques and Culebra are U.S. citizens, and no fellow citizen should be left “clamoring for help.” They need help now, and we urge that you provide them with sufficient aid and assistance without further delay.

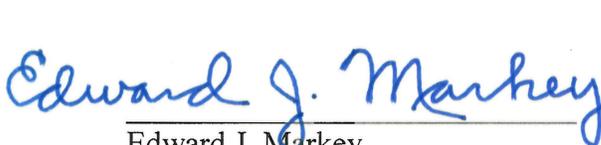
Sincerely,

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

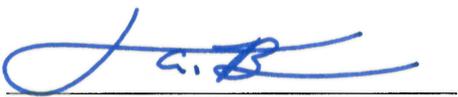
  
Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

  
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

  
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

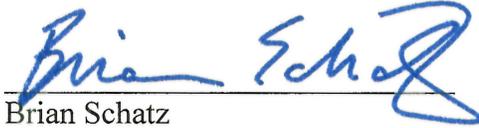
  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

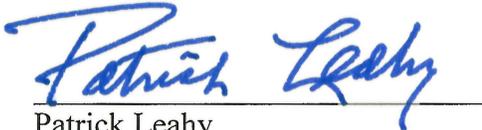
<sup>3</sup> Emily Atkin, “Puerto Rico is already an environmental tragedy. Hurricane Maria will make it even worse,” New Republic, Sept. 19, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144888/puerto-rico-already-environmental-tragedy-hurricane-maria-will-make-even-worse>.



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator