

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 20, 2018

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

Dear Administrator Long:

We write to express our sincere disappointment with your decision to allow the expiration of the local cost share waivers for Category A (debris removal) and Category B (emergency protective measures) under the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance program in Puerto Rico. Given Puerto Rico's unstable financial condition, and the amount of emergency work that is yet to be completed, we urge you to reconsider your decision and extend the 100% federal cost-share for these programs for another 90 days.

One year has passed since Hurricane Maria nearly destroyed the island of Puerto Rico and its people are still suffering its consequences. As of August 30, according to figures provided by the Puerto Rico government, the Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program still had more than 64,895 work orders to complete, which is more than 50 percent of the total 110,877 work orders submitted. Illegal dumpsites have proliferated in the absence of effective debris removal, creating hazardous health and environmental conditions. Critical health and safety facilities on the island still rely on generator power to ensure safety and continuity; and hundreds may be homeless after the expiration of the Transitional Shelter Assistance program last week. All of this is playing out as the Island still faces a crippled economy.

We are very concerned about the Commonwealth's ability to pay the local cost-share for the remaining emergency work. Many municipalities have spent significant amounts of their operating budgets and financial reserves on disaster response and simply do not have funding available for a local cost-share. These financial challenges will only be exacerbated as permanent work, which requires a 10 percent local cost-share requirement, begins. Additionally, it is our understanding that it may be several months before the bulk of the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding that Congress appropriated under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018—in part to assist disaster-affected communities with meeting their local cost-share requirements for permanent work—is obligated.

The bottom line is that the vast majority of the approximately 3,000 American citizens who perished as a result of Hurricane Maria were not killed by the storm surge, rain or wind, but rather as a result of an inadequate and inept response for which the federal government bears substantial responsibility. The loss of life will never be replaced and the emotional scars from this tragedy may never heal, but there is still more that can be done to facilitate the recovery process. We strongly urge you to fulfil your duty to the American citizens living on the Island by

helping to course-correct this administration's failed response and approving Puerto Rico's request to reinstate the 100% federal cost-share for emergency work for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico for another 90 days.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator