

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 3, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Members Leahy and Lowey:

As you begin consideration of a supplemental appropriations bill to provide relief for the victims of the 2018 hurricane season and the wildfires in California, we urge you to consider the continued financial and humanitarian needs of the victims of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Specifically, we request that you consider appropriating an additional \$600 million for Puerto Rico's Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) for fiscal year 2019. Last October, as part of the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Requirements Act of 2017, P.L. 115-72, Congress appropriated an additional \$1.27 billion for NAP to help Puerto Rico meet the nutritional needs of its most vulnerable populations in the aftermath of the hurricane. This funding will run out by early spring 2019.

As you know, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico does not participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) like the rest of the 50 States, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands do. Instead, Puerto Rico, which is home to 3.5 million American citizens, of which half live under the federal poverty line, receives a block grant, which limits its capacity to meet increased need when the economy stumbles or a natural disaster strikes.¹ Puerto Rico was already operating under a crippled economy when Hurricane Maria, one of the worst natural disasters to hit American soil in modern history, struck the island. With an official death toll of 2,975 people, the second-largest electricity blackout on record and the longest one in American history, the storm's lasting economic effects are still felt across the island more than a year later.

One of those effects was leaving 85 percent of the Island's population food insecure. The requested additional appropriation of \$600 million in disaster NAP funding will ensure that the over 230,000 new program participants in Puerto Rico keep food on their tables and allow

¹ Wolkomir, E. (Nov. 27, 2017). *How is food assistance different in Puerto Rico than in the rest of the United States*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Washington, DC.

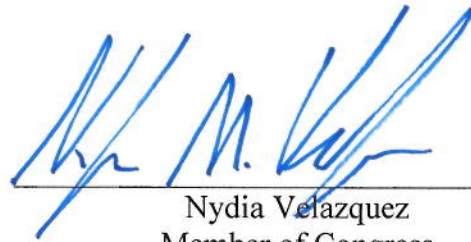
previous enrollees to continue to receive assistance, through Fiscal Year 2019, at levels similar to families living in the continental United States who receive SNAP benefits.

Federal nutrition assistance programs were created to help our most vulnerable citizens, especially in times of great need. It is Congress's responsibility to provide funding for nutritional assistance to every American family, no matter where they live, in order to allow them a basic level of sustenance and have a dignified life. We must help the people of Puerto Rico, even if the President would discontinue federal money for its continued relief efforts.² We appreciate your leadership in helping Puerto Rico recover and thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

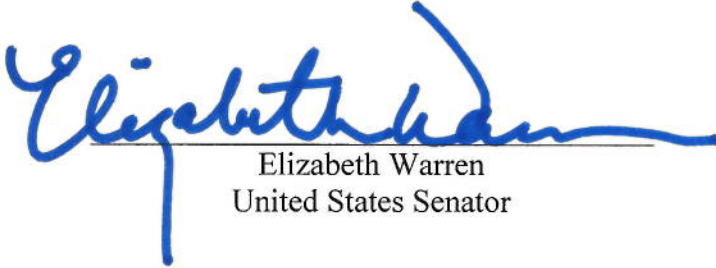
Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Nydia Velazquez
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Charlie Crist
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

² Swan, J. (Nov. 11, 2018) *Trump wants no more relief funds for Puerto Rico*. Axios. Accessed online at https://www.axios.com/donald-trump-federal-funding-puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-c9e4edc8-2365-40be-af36-8d91463578d6.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=twsocialshare&utm_campaign=organic