

National Hispanic Leadership Agenda

October 1, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Request for Additional and Immediate Emergency Relief for Victims of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, a coalition of 45 leading Hispanic organizations in the United States, we urge you to immediately take additional emergency steps to assist the victims of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico, our fellow American citizens.

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane María devastated the entire archipelago of Puerto Rico, leaving 100% of its residents without electricity and the majority without water. The storm has caused unknown amounts of property damage with unprecedented flooding, winds and rain. The dam on the Lake Guajataca threatened to break just days after, causing an immediate evacuation of nearly 70,000 in surrounding towns. The island's communication infrastructure was completely damaged, taking Puerto Rico off the grid and leaving every single resident initially without electricity or the ability to communicate via phone or internet. To date, hundreds of thousands have not been able to call or email loved ones and are still incommunicado. Most of the island remains without water and electricity.

Many people have yet to return to their homes to document the damage, if they can arrive given the treacherous terrain to cross the destroyed roads and dangerous conditions. The Governor of Puerto Rico imposed an indefinite curfew, which restricts the mobility of people to return to their homes, and the time they have available. Many are searching for food, water, supplies and gasoline. The resulting humanitarian crisis since the hurricane has created continuing deep despair. Few are concentrating in assessing property damage or searching for ways to be compensated when their immediate survival needs are still present.

Every member of our national coalition has family and friends on the island of Puerto Rico and many of them have yet to make contact with their loved ones. Many of our members are anxious to personally help their friends and relatives and see for themselves the extent of Hurricane María's impact. To that end we urge you to encourage individual members of Congress to personally witness this devastation so they can attest to it themselves and act in concert for its amelioration.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alianza Americas
American G.I. Forum
ASPIRA Association
Avance Inc.
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
Farmworker Justice
Green Latinos
Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities
Hispanic Federation
Hispanic National Bar Association
Inter-University Program for Latino Research
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of United Latin American Citizens
MANA, A National Latina Organization
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Mi Familia Vota
National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives
National Association of Hispanic Publications
National Day Laborer Organizing Network
NALEO Educational Fund
National Association of Latino Independent Producers
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Hispanic Environmental Council
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Institute for Latino Policy
National Latina/o Psychological Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Presente.org
SER Jobs for Progress National
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project
UnidosUS
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
U.S.- Mexico Foundation
Voto Latino

Your Administration has taken a number of critically important first steps but they are not nearly enough to address the magnitude of this crisis. Accordingly, we urge that you take each of the following ten steps to avoid further loss of life and irreparable damage in Puerto Rico. In solidarity with our fellow American citizens of the U.S. Virgin Islands, the home of many Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, we also urge you to take additional steps to address their own tragic situation similar to the ones we outline below for Puerto Rico:

1. Propose a Congressional appropriation of additional and immediate disaster relief funding in a clean relief bill specifically earmarked for Puerto Rico; early estimates are north of \$70 billion dollars and this appropriations bill should match that. This funding package must include economic tools for Puerto Rico to get back on its feet as quickly as possible, given the 10-year recession that has plagued the Island. Any recovery package must first, and foremost, act like a Marshall Plan for Puerto Rico, because María's damage is only comparable to that of a war zone. Economic development is the only path to true recovery.
2. Extend the FEMA 60-day deadline for filing claims for disaster relief for an additional 120 days; it is clear that the current humanitarian crisis, loss of power and access to the internet prevents people from assessing their property damage and making claims on a timely basis. Moreover, current predictions are for Puerto Rico to gain full access to electrical power in 4 to 6 months, necessitating a much longer deadline for claims.
3. Extend the Jones Act waiver for Puerto Rico beyond the 10 days you already approved for one full year to allow Puerto Rico to have more access to oil, food, medicines, clothing and building supplies. The waiver will also lower the cost of all imported goods needed for the reconstruction effort.
4. Deploy significantly more U.S. military personnel immediately to ensure relief supplies are delivered and help preserve law and order.
5. We applaud your designation of Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan to serve as the officer in charge of the recovery. Now he must be given all the tools available to the U.S. Armed Forces to provide logistics, communication and engineering assets to remove debris, clear roads and ensure areas cut off from contact receive assistance immediately.
6. Allocate sufficient appropriations in disaster relief to ensure climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience. Puerto Rico's precious ecosystem was already compromised; this catastrophe exacerbates those harms.
7. Waive the federal matching requirements for FEMA disaster public assistance programs beyond the 180 days you approved. This devastating crisis will take years to redress and requiring cost-sharing after only 6 months will take local resources away from the most vulnerable.
8. Eliminate Puerto Rico's federal ceiling on Medicaid and provide full funding for Medicaid on a parity basis. Without an influx of additional Medicaid funds those that María has newly thrust into poverty will not have access to healthcare; and those who qualified before Hurricane María, and whose situation was exacerbated by the disaster, may find themselves in third-world healthcare conditions, a situation unheard of in modern U.S. history.
9. Approve the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program to enable Puerto Rico to rebuild homes, provide temporary housing, and repair infrastructure vital to its recovery. Additionally, include Puerto Rico in both the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit programs so as to speed up the needed recovery.
10. The Puerto Rican recovery should be driven by Puerto Ricans and this includes keeping their rights and safeguards intact. Each of these proposed steps must be implemented in a way that does not compromise or undermine the long-term development, safeguards, and rights of the people of Puerto Rico and their ability to influence their recovery. The recovery in Puerto Rico must protect labor, public engagement, civil rights safeguards, the National Environmental Policy Act and other protections.

The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda recognizes that these are profoundly important proposals that require a comprehensive approach to recovery. If they are deemed ambitious it is because they are necessary. No place in the United States and its territories has ever been hit by two category 4-5 hurricanes in the space of weeks like Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

These are our fellow American citizens and they deserve nothing less than the full might of U.S. deployment, efficiency and compassion.

Sincerely,



Hector E. Sanchez Barba
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Executive Director, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)

cc:

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Members of the United States Senate
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives