

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 15, 2017

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

The Honorable Ben Carson  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban  
Development  
451 Seventh Street SW  
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Administrator Long and Secretary Carson:

We write with deep concern about the federal response to Hurricanes Maria and Irma, particularly as it relates to addressing the housing needs of the multitudes of newly-displaced families in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands (USVI). Among them are some of the over 100,000 families in Puerto Rico who were receiving assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at the time Maria made landfall. While we were pleased the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released long-awaited guidance on housing resources for hurricane survivors in Puerto Rico on October 30, 2017, it remains unclear to what extent FEMA is coordinating with HUD to respond to the disaster. Moreover, we are concerned that a lack of effective coordination will unnecessarily delay assistance and could have disastrous consequences for the families in greatest need.

The federal government's responses to previous disasters of similar scale should be instructive. To address temporary housing needs in the wake of Katrina, the Bush Administration initially chose to provide some displaced families with trailers, cash grants, and short-term stays in hotels and motels—solutions that proved inadequate to meet the needs of affected residents. Months later, the Bush Administration conducted a comprehensive review of the federal government's response to the disaster, identifying lessons learned and furnishing recommendations on how the federal government should respond to future disasters. One of those recommendations was closer coordination between FEMA and HUD.<sup>1</sup> It is crucial for the agency and the department to heed this essential recommendation, especially given the scope of the devastation in Puerto Rico and USVI.

As part of that coordination, we encourage you to consider establishing a disaster housing assistance program (DHAP). Such a program would allow the federal government to leverage its relationships with housing agencies across the country to help respond to the crisis. It would also facilitate improved data sharing among FEMA, HUD, public housing authorities, and other housing providers in the states to expedite temporary and long-term assistance for low-income households. Ultimately, the policies that the department and the agency consider must be informed by federal and local coordination, including: a combination of FEMA's disaster

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<sup>1</sup> THE WHITE HOUSE, THE FEDERAL RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA: LESSONS LEARNED 108 (Feb. 2006), available at <https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps67263/katrina-lessons-learned.pdf>


assessments, data provided by the governments of Puerto Rico and USVI, and the needs of citizens on the islands.

We are prepared to work with you to provide additional resources for unmet needs and to work to ensure that assistance is deployed effectively to help families on the islands. To that end, we request prompt answers to the following questions:

1. What resources are available for the people of Puerto Rico and USVI today to quickly and properly house displaced persons—both for people on the islands and for those who have evacuated to the mainland?
2. How many HUD-assisted households were impacted by Irma and Maria, and to what extent—if any—is FEMA coordinating with HUD to ensure that displaced persons in Puerto Rico and USVI are quickly and properly housed?
3. What are your deadlines for coming up with temporary medium- and long-term housing solutions for the people of Puerto Rico and USVI?
4. Given the initial damage assessments of public housing infrastructure, single-family homes, and rental units for Puerto Rico's and USVI's lowest-income residents, what are some options available to the people of Puerto Rico and USVI, housing authorities in Puerto Rico and USVI, and housing authorities and organizations in diaspora states to meet the additional needs of displaced families?
5. Have you identified any data sharing gaps that must be addressed in order for federal disaster benefits to flow efficiently to Puerto Rican and USVI families in need of housing in the wake of Hurricanes Maria and Irma? If so, what is required to improve data sharing at the federal and local levels?

Hurricanes Maria and Irma have presented a housing crisis that the people of Puerto Rico and USVI may face for months or years to come. We must do all to ensure these citizens will be assisted in an adequate and timely manner. We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

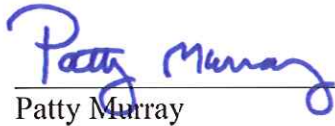
Sincerely,



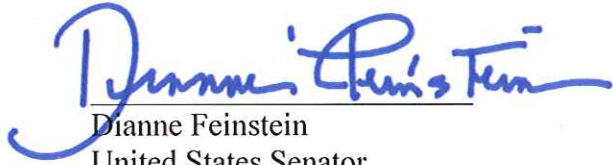
Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



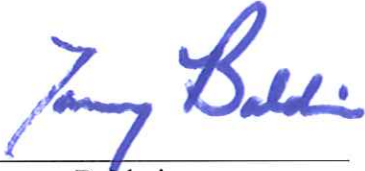
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



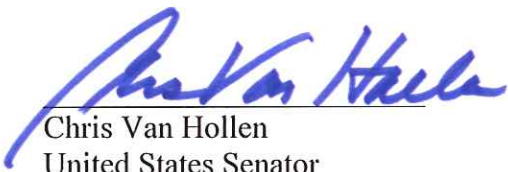
Al Franken  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Bill Nelson  
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