



December 12, 2017

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), we urge you to act swiftly on a robust disaster supplemental aid package to assist the impacted people of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida, Texas and California.

The devastating consequences from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria continue to challenge communities throughout Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida and Texas. While the first two rounds of supplemental assistance were vital for saving lives in the initial emergency phase of the response, the reality is that more than 1 million people in Puerto Rico, nearly 890,000 people in Texas, 2.6 million people in Florida, and over 33,000 people in the U.S. Virgin Islands (over a third of its population) have requested FEMA Individual Assistance. These numbers do not include those people who have not been able to register, particularly those in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands who still have no electricity or cell phone service. The urgent need for a robust response to the ongoing crisis and for support of the communities and organizations on the ground responding to the crisis cannot be overstated.

After the hurricanes, in collaboration with local bishops and support of the USCCB, Catholic Charities, USA, has been assisting the heroic efforts of the local Catholic Charities agencies in the impacted regions with more than \$24 million in financial support. The money has enabled these agencies to distribute emergency supplies, provide immediate financial assistance to those most in need, initiate long term disaster case management, and offer additional response and recovery activities specific to the local need. At the same time, Catholic schools opened their doors to students to ensure that all children had access to education while relief efforts were ongoing. The USCCB, through its Office of National Collections, and bishops throughout the United States have been in close solidarity with the local church to help assess needs and bring financial and other support.

However, a real danger is that, as the crisis moves from the daily headlines, so does the sense of urgency that drives volunteer efforts and financial support. Support for a disaster supplemental aid package at this time will have real and lasting impact for these communities.

In considering priorities for the disaster supplemental it is urged that you:

- Provide robust resources above the \$44 billion request without offset requirements.
- Authorize at least \$20 billion in funding through the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program and ensure that funds prioritize the precariously housed, elderly, and poor.

- Improve the law to allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Army Corp of Engineers and other agencies to rebuild damaged infrastructure to modern 21st – century standards to withstand future storms.
- Appropriate funds to HUD’s Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) that will provide low-income individuals temporary rental assistance and case management services.
- Provide legislative guidance to states on the equitable allocation of funds between homeowners, renters, the homeless and the precariously housed.
- Include legislative language to provide tuition assistance to nonpublic schools for students displaced by the disasters.

In addition to the above, greater priority should be given to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands by directly addressing the needs of the people on these islands. Puerto Rico was already in the midst of an economic crisis that has only been compounded by the devastation from the hurricanes. You are urged to:

- Make a specific allocation of resources for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in any supplemental bill.
- Provide legislative language which would allow U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands the same access to federal Medicaid, Medicare, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) resources as any other U.S. citizen.
- Waive cost share requirements for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Island for rebuilding projects and FEMA assistance programs, and provide Puerto Rico with additional debt relief so that it can prioritize economic and humanitarian recovery.
- Ensure that the voices of decision makers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are heard so that they can be leaders in rebuilding and rehabilitating their communities.

The USCCB and CCUSA stand ready to work with you in the recovery effort for those impacted by natural disaster, and continue to walk with those in need along the road to recovery.

Sincerely,

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Most Reverend Frank J Dewane
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development


Sr. Donna Markham OP, PhD
President and CEO
Catholic Charities USA