



HISPANIC BAR ASSOCIATION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

P.O. Box 1011 Washington, D.C. 20013-1011

www.hbadc.org

October 6, 2017

Via Electronic Mail

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton
2136 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Aid & Accountability for Puerto Rico

Dear Congresswoman Norton:

I write on behalf of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia (HBA-DC) to express our deep concern that 3.4 million U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico are not receiving the aid they desperately need after Hurricane Maria made landfall on September 20, 2017 and destroyed key infrastructure including electrical grid and clean drinking water. The Puerto Rican community was already struggling with a lack of power from the effects of Hurricane Irma. We ask you to help Puerto Rico secure adequate federal-government aid, including from the military and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); assist Puerto Rico in obtaining a long-term commitment from the federal government to dedicate the federal resources necessary to rebuild Puerto Rico; and introduce legislation to form a bipartisan commission to review the federal response to Hurricanes Maria and Irma.

The HBA-DC is a non-profit, non-partisan professional organization dedicated to advancing and developing Latinos in the legal profession, and promoting equal justice and opportunity for all Latinos in the Washington, DC area and beyond. The HBA-DC membership includes many attorneys of Puerto Rican descent who live and work in the District and neighboring states. The tragedy in Puerto Rico reminds us that we must continue to use our platform to advance justice for all Latinos, including our family, friends, community members, and fellow Americans in Puerto Rico.

Adequate and timely federal government aid is crucial, and we request that you press Congress and the Administration to ensure Puerto Rico receives this aid immediately. Hurricane Maria is the worst natural disaster to hit Puerto Rico in nearly a century, killing at least 34 people, crippling emergency medical services, and leaving just about every one of the island's residents in need of some type of recovery assistance.¹ More than half of all residents lack access to

¹ Hijazi, Jennifer, *How You Can Help Hurricane Victims in Puerto Rico* (Sept. 25, 2017), <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/can-help-hurricane-victims-puerto-rico/>.

drinking water and millions remain without power nearly two weeks after the hurricane hit Puerto Rico.² The storm destroyed roads and cell phone towers that could have otherwise facilitated communication and helped bring relief to people in need.³ Consequently, the federal aid that has been dispatched to Puerto Rico has yet to reach many who desperately need the assistance. Multiple news sources indicate that the relief effort from FEMA and other entities of the federal government has been insufficiently prompt and robust. Our government should dedicate all available means to address this emergency without further delay.

Rebuilding from this tragedy will take years. We urge you to press your colleagues in Congress to allocate the funds necessary to allow Puerto Rico to rebuild and to encourage the federal government to make a long-term commitment to rebuilding Puerto Rico. Experts predict that many parts of Puerto Rico will be out of power for months.⁴ Based on early estimates, repairing the damage to the island will cost between \$45 and \$95 billion.⁵ The storm destroyed 80 percent of Puerto Rico's crops,⁶ leaving it unable to sell or live off its own produce. This at a time when Puerto Rico was already facing a battered economy due to an 11-year recession that has essentially forced 10 percent of its population off the island.⁷ It is clear that Puerto Rico will need long-term assistance, which requires a commitment from the federal government to aid the island's residents with vital resources.

The anemic and inconsistent response to the disaster in Puerto Rico is troubling and requires immediate attention and study. This is why we request that you introduce legislation to form a bipartisan commission to review the civilian and federal response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. While the damage has yet to be assessed in its totality, what is clear is that the immediate response was insufficient considering the colossal damage and devastation left in the wake of the hurricane. This tragedy could have been mitigated with better planning and proper attention. A commission should be organized to learn from the response to this tragedy and to ensure that, in the future, all Americans receive timely assistance during emergencies such as the one created by Hurricane Maria.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ben Hernandez-Stern
President

² Reuters, *Puerto Rico's Governor Says Island is on a "Steady Path to Improvement" After Hurricane Maria* (Oct. 1, 2017), <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-puerto-rico-governor-says-relief-arriving-to-storm-ravaged-rural-areas-2017-10>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Disis, Jill, *Hurricane Maria Could Be a \$95 Billion Storm for Puerto Rico* (Sept. 28, 2017), <http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/28/news/economy/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-damage-estimate/index.html>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

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