

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 12, 2018

The Honorable Brock Long
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Long:

We write to yet again call on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to work with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to activate meaningful, long-term housing solutions, like the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), to ensure that Puerto Rican survivors of the devastating Hurricane Maria are able to afford safe, stable housing—a basic, fundamental human right. FEMA must also immediately abandon arbitrary deadlines on the Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) hotel program that continue to leave families in limbo until such long-term housing is available for TSA recipients.

It has been ten months since Hurricane Maria ravaged the island of Puerto Rico, crippling critical infrastructure and creating a humanitarian crisis that left countless families displaced and without access to power, housing, fuel, food, and potable water. Many homes were destroyed and lost forever creating an unprecedented, catastrophic housing crisis that continues to persist and even exacerbate as a result of FEMA's negligence and faulty, highly flawed response. And, as a new hurricane season begins, Puerto Rico's stalled recovery puts American citizens at risk. For example, as the first storm of the Atlantic hurricane season approached the island on July 9th, 60,000 people still had tarps for roofs. In the hours before the storm made landfall, 24,000 people lost electricity.

Past administrations—regardless of party—have recognized that HUD—not FEMA—has the experience and capacity to address housing recovery efforts. FEMA's recent attempts to shift disaster housing recovery efforts on to states and local governments has continued to fail survivors and further demonstrates the Agency's inability to adequately address this crisis.

Despite the dangerously uninhabitable conditions that persist in Puerto Rico, on June 30th FEMA planned to inhumanely evict nearly 2,000 displaced families from the TSA hotel program. While living in a hotel for an extended period of time is certainly no solution to this crisis, many families rely on this program as a critical lifeline and last resort housing option.

On June 30th, a United States District Court judge issued a nationwide restraining order in *Asencio et al v. Federal Emergency Management Agency, et al.* temporarily barring FEMA from

arbitrarily ending TSA and evicting displaced Puerto Rican families until July 24th—regardless of whether survivors had stable, affordable housing opportunities in place.

Especially in light of the *Asencio* injunction, we urge FEMA to reconsider its rejection of DHAP or other long term housing solutions that were successfully implemented for many other American citizens who were displaced by hurricanes. DHAP, for example, has been used since Hurricane Katrina and has served as a best practice successfully used in response to major disasters by both Republican and Democratic administrations to assist individuals and families, including children, veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities with temporary rental assistance. FEMA's failure to utilize this tool and rejection of requests for longer-term housing solutions, like DHAP—made by survivors, the Governor of Puerto Rico, members of Congress, and homelessness and housing advocates—has resulted in thousands facing increased risk of evictions, and in worst cases, homelessness, forcing individuals with no other choice but to sleep in cars or on streets.

The devastating effects of this historic natural disaster have called for a historic response. Due to the urgent need for long-term housing solutions for thousands of American families, we request that FEMA promptly respond with its plan to expeditiously implement DHAP and extend TSA by July 26, 2018.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate



BILL NELSON
United States Senate



EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate