

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 9, 2020

The Honorable Pete T. Gaynor
Acting Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Acting Administrator:

We write to demand that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) acts swiftly to assist our fellow American citizens in Puerto Rico recover from the recent earthquakes, and to demand that FEMA uses all of the authority granted under the Emergency Declaration to ensure the safety of lives and property across the island. The Emergency Declaration issued on January 7 is welcome, but merely a small, first step, as the destruction in impacted parts of Puerto Rico demands a comprehensive response and prompt approval of further levels of disaster aid which the situation clearly requires.

According to US Geological Survey, hundreds of small earthquakes have occurred over the past several weeks around Puerto Rico, beginning in earnest with a 4.7-magnitude earthquake late on December 28. On January 6, a 5.8-magnitude event rocked the island, followed yesterday morning by the 6.5-magnitude event that caused widespread damage. Tragically, yesterday's earthquake claimed the life of a 73-year-old man in the southern city of Ponce and left at least eight others injured. Additionally, the Costa Sur power generation plant – the largest on Puerto Rico's grid – was severely damaged by the earthquake and as of this morning, about 500,000 customers were still without power. Without power, the 300,000 Puerto Ricans who rely on electric water pumps are now also without water, which has obvious serious public health implications. Horrendously, there are reports that thousands of Puerto Ricans slept outside under tarps, in tents, or on mattresses because they feared their homes would collapse on their heads.

Clearly, more must be done, and fast. The uneven and inadequate disaster response by FEMA, and other federal agencies, in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria make it even more crucial that Puerto Rico receives a swift, adequately resourced, and effectively coordinated response to this disaster. These earthquakes make it even more unconscionable the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) inaction in disbursing the \$8.3 billion in Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding appropriated for mitigation projects in Puerto Rico. There is not substantive reason to withhold this congressionally-mandated disaster aid for our fellow Americans on the island; this money must be made available to Puerto Rico now.

We call on FEMA to use all of the authority granted under the January 7 Emergency Declaration to provide Puerto Rico with the assistance they so desperately need, including the speedy completion of preliminary disaster assessments, and the prompt approval of other desperately

needed levels of disaster aid. We thank the governor for her work thus far and stand ready to support her request for a Major Disaster Declaration if she requests one after FEMA's Preliminary Damage Assessments.

We appreciate your swift attention and consideration of this request and stand ready to work with FEMA to deliver support and resources to the impacted communities.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

CC: Ben Carson, Secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development
Wanda Vázquez Garced, Governor of Puerto Rico