

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 1, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you develop a bipartisan and bicameral disaster supplemental appropriations measure to provide much needed relief to communities across the country affected by recent natural disasters, we write to urge your prompt consideration of appropriating \$610 million for Puerto Rico's Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP). We would also urge you to consider including additional measures outlined below addressing critical infrastructure, education, and housing needs on the island.

Unlike the eligible citizens living in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which benefit from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), eligible American citizens living in Puerto Rico receive a finite block-grant appropriation for NAP. Therefore, while victims of hurricanes in Louisiana, Texas, Florida, and other states can receive SNAP benefits for as long as they meet eligibility requirements, in Puerto Rico, those eligible for NAP can be cut off if the appropriation limit is met.

Earlier this week, Senate Republicans introduced a disaster aid package that included \$610 million for NAP – indicating that there is bipartisan support for this funding. Puerto Rico will exhaust its current disaster-level NAP appropriation in March. An additional \$610 million should provide sufficient resources to provide food and other nutritional benefits to all eligible Puerto Ricans through the end of the current fiscal year – on par with their fellow American citizens in all 50 states.

However, we are deeply disappointed that the aid package introduced by Senate Republicans failed to include funding for other disaster-related needs in Puerto Rico. We have an obligation to provide the island with sufficient post-hurricane resources to address the massive infrastructure needs to put Puerto Rico on a pathway towards long-term economic recovery. Specifically, we respectfully request that the following provisions from previous supplemental appropriations bills be included in any final disaster aid package:

- Provide 100 percent federal cost share in Puerto Rico for Public Assistance (PA) for Categories A and B under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.
- Allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to waive the prior-condition limitation for PA awards on the island so that grants can be used to update and improve public facilities past their pre-disaster condition.
- Allow funds provided for the Defraying the Cost of Enrolling Displaced Students program to be shifted to the Emergency Assistance to Institutions of Higher Education program to further assist Puerto Rico.
- Provide additional, robust funding for Community Development Block Grants-Disaster Recovery.
- Appropriate \$5 million to conduct an analysis of how the NAP program functions on the island with the intent of improving performance.
- Appropriate \$25 million for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to put towards the Martín Peña Channel project to improve the economy, protect public health, and restore the natural environment in some of Puerto Rico's most distressed communities.

It is crucial that you bring a disaster supplemental bill – with robust funding to address these critical issues – to the floor for consideration at the earliest opportunity. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to bring much needed relief to the island.

Sincerely,



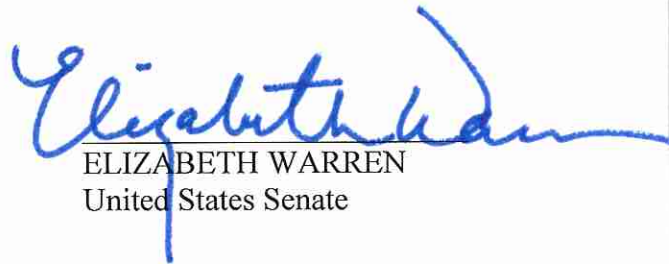
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United States Senate



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senate



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senate



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate