

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 12, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

As Puerto Rico looks to rebuild and recover from Hurricane Fiona's devastation, we are concerned about the accessibility and availability of federal relief applications, documentation, and other materials in Spanish. We request you ensure the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and other federal entities make all resources available, accessible, and correctly translated in Spanish. In addition, we strongly urge FEMA to expeditiously establish Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) in additional municipalities in Puerto Rico.

The United States Commission on Civil Rights issued a report that found language access was a significant issue in accessing federal assistance for survivors of both Hurricanes Maria and Harvey.<sup>1</sup> In Puerto Rico, FEMA did not have enough Spanish-speaking employees to accommodate the Island, leading to delays in aid. The Commission also received testimony that even after documents had been translated into Spanish, they were often inaccurate and confusing. While some improvements have been made on this issue, we urge your administration to review all Spanish documents and resources for accuracy, especially in light of the recent hurricanes. We also ask you prioritize increasing fluent Spanish-speaking staff to provide residents with comprehensive and timely assistance.

In addition, we request that you direct FEMA to quickly establish additional Disaster Recovery Centers across multiple municipalities on the island. DRCs are critical in helping survivors access disaster assistance programs, understand written correspondence, and learn of federal grant opportunities to make their homes more resilient. Many residents currently do not have electricity to have an internet connection. Others may lack the computer technology to access the internet. Furthermore, almost a quarter of the Puerto Rican population is over the age of 65, and may have limited, if any, computer literacy.<sup>2</sup> With internet accessibility being a potential issue, establishing more DRCs will help ensure a more equitable recovery of the island.

Given the damaged infrastructure across the Island, we urge you to promptly ensure FEMA, USDA, SBA, and all other relevant federal agencies make their resources and applications

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2022-09/2022-statutory-report-fema.pdf>

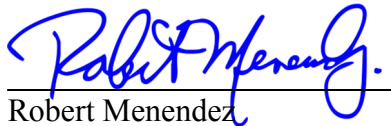
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/PR>

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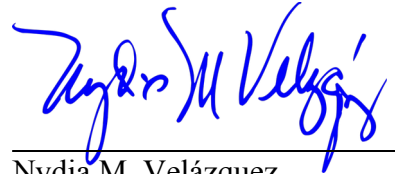
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comprehensive and available in Spanish, and establish more physical centers throughout the Island for those who lack internet resources. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



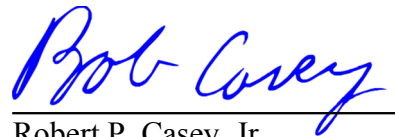
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



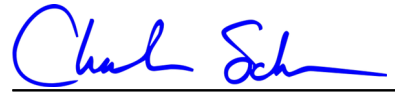
Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



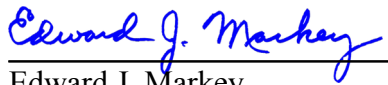
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



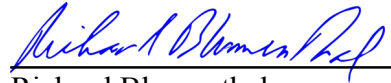
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

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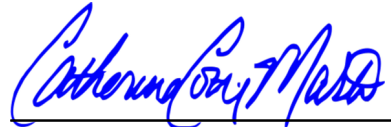
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



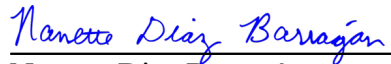
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



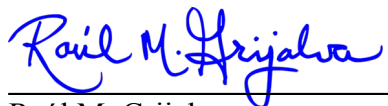
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress



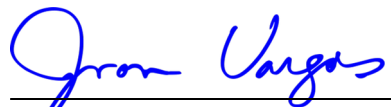
Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress



Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

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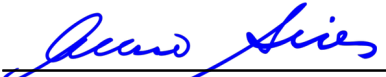
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Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress



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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



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Albio Sires  
Member of Congress



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Darren Soto  
Member of Congress

cc. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)  
Small Business Administration (SBA)  
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)