



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

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Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Sam Graves, MO
Ranking Member

March 9, 2020

Katherine W. Dedrick, Staff Director

Paul J. Sass, Republican Staff Director

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472-0001

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write to express our concerns regarding deficiencies in Federal assistance provided by DR-4473-PR, the Major Disaster declaration granted to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico for a series of significant earthquakes beginning on December 28, 2019 and ending on February 4, 2020. To date, the President and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have only partially responded to the January 11, 2020 request from Governor Wanda Vázquez Garced.

Last month, we led separate Congressional delegations to assess the ongoing recovery efforts in the Commonwealth from the unprecedented 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria, as well as to assess the damages to infrastructure and conditions for survivors resulting from the quakes. The ongoing hurricane recovery work between FEMA and the Commonwealth's Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3) is encouraging. Unfortunately, we are troubled that you have yet to approve permanent repair Federal assistance via Categories C-G of the Public Assistance program more than two months following the Governor's initial request.

The damages that we observed in many municipalities across southern Puerto Rico are not only devastating to those communities today, they will adversely impact those areas as we approach another hurricane season. Several public schools and other government facilities that serve as community shelters in times of need have either collapsed, shifted from their foundations, or are otherwise structurally unsafe and require permanent repair or replacement. Absent the approval of Categories C-G, the only Federal assistance available to these municipalities is for demolition of unsafe structures and debris removal.

In a January 14, 2020 briefing to Members of the House Appropriations Committee and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, then FEMA Associate Administrator for Response and Recovery,

Jeffrey Byard, was asked if the damages from the magnitude 6.4 quake of January 7 had reached a severity aligned with other disaster events that were eventually granted a Major Disaster declaration pursuant to the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act*, to include the full complement of Public Assistance. Byard responded in the affirmative. Now, more than seven weeks later, the Commonwealth is still awaiting approval regarding Categories C-G.

Per the Stafford Act, now that the President has granted the declaration, you have the authority to amend the declaration accordingly. We applaud your decision to do so multiple times since the initial declaration, including making impacted survivors eligible for Individual Assistance. Now, we are calling on you to amend the declaration at least once more to grant approval for the Commonwealth to receive Federal assistance under Public Assistance Categories C-G.


It is imperative that you address this issue now so that Puerto Rico can begin its recovery to these earthquakes as soon as possible, alongside the ongoing recoveries from the 2017 hurricanes.

We look forward to your immediate attention to this matter. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Aaron Davis on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure staff at (202) 225-9961 or Trent Bauserman in the Office of the Majority Leader at (202) 225-3130.

Sincerely,



STENY H. HOYER
Member of Congress



PETER A. DeFAZIO
Member of Congress



CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress



NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ
Member of Congress



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