



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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May 17, 2019

Dear Senator:

Members of the Coalition on Human Needs strongly urge you to enact a disaster relief bill now. Our members are national organizations representing millions of human service providers, people of faith, policy experts, labor, civil rights and other advocates concerned with meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable people. For months, we have become increasingly concerned as the Senate has failed to enact aid. This failure has caused a drastic reduction in Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) benefits for 1.4 million people in Puerto Rico starting in March. It has delayed needed aid to many states and territories afflicted by hurricanes, typhoons, flooding, and wildfires. Enactment of a new supplemental disaster appropriations bill is long overdue – the Senate must act now.

We understand that negotiations may be at a promising point, and we know that there is bipartisan support for a disaster recovery bill that meets the needs of all affected states, territories, and tribes. Specifically, we urge you to insist on and vote for a bill that includes:



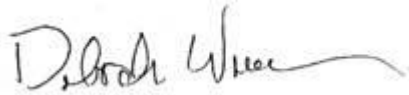
- **Nutrition and other assistance Puerto Rico and other territories need:** In addition to \$605 million for Puerto Rico's Nutrition Assistance Program, the Senate should include environmental and housing reconstruction funding as was included in House disaster relief legislation (H.R. 2157), including funding for the Caño Martín Peña Ecosystem Restoration Project. Nutrition assistance is also needed for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and for American Samoa.
- **Medicaid funds** to prevent loss of vital medical care in the territories of Northern Mariana Islands, Guam and American Samoa, as provided in H.R. 2157.
- **Requirements that OMB and/or HUD release billions of dollars in disaster relief funding** Congress has already approved for Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Puerto Rico.
- **Disaster funding to assist states, territories, and tribes** in rebuilding housing, medical facilities and schools, and to provide for flood control and safe water projects, legal services, assistance for farmers and other needs to recover from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, Florence, and Michael, Typhoons Yutu and Mangkhut and wildfire damage.
- **Humanitarian aid to unaccompanied migrant children:** If funding is to be provided for HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement services within this bill, it must be made conditional on clear demonstration to Congress that the funds will support increased use of child-friendly community-based residential care and small-scale shelters subject to state regulation, with Congressional oversight requiring DHS and HHS reporting on influx facilities, family separation, and other conditions related to child and family well-being. Members of the Coalition on Human Needs recognize the need for more funding to meet the needs of migrant children and families; Congress must ensure that funds are not used for inhumane detention or to separate children from their families.

Disasters cannot always be prevented, but it is unconscionable that a slow federal response has made conditions worse. It is our nation's duty to support those whose lives and livelihood are

threatened by acts of nature, and it is our moral obligation to meet the needs of all people, not just the politically powerful. Because the Senate did not act before March, people in Puerto Rico could not afford food. That includes [Suzette de Jesus](#), a mother of four, who said “With my salary alone, I can’t buy a month’s worth of groceries” – not without being unable to pay for rent or utilities. It includes [María Concepción](#), a 52 year old woman with epilepsy and cancer, who had walked two hours seeking an appointment for assistance and who had not eaten in two days.

We know that hardships are affecting states, territories, and tribes nationwide, hurting farmers and teachers, people in rural and urban areas, commercial businesses and human service providers, children and seniors. The 2019 Atlantic hurricane season begins *June 1*, and the long-delayed rebuilding in many locations is increasing communities’ vulnerability. Please – no more delay. The Senate must act in time for final House action and enactment before the Memorial Day recess.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deborah Weinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deborah Weinstein
Executive Director