



Legislation Text

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Urging President Donald Trump, the United States Congress, and its leadership at the House and Senate to act quickly in their federal relief efforts to assist the over 3.4 million United States citizens who live in Puerto Rico following the devastation of Hurricane Maria on September 20, 2017.

WHEREAS, On Wednesday, September 20, 2017 Hurricane Maria, the worst storm to hit Puerto Rico since 1928, made landfall, taking out the electric and telecommunication grid to over 3.4 million American citizens in Puerto Rico and destroying countless structures in its path. One hundred percent of residential properties were left without electricity and running water; and

WHEREAS, According to the Associated Press, 1,360 of the island's 1,600 cell phone towers were destroyed by Hurricane Maria and 85% of above-ground and underground phone and internet cables were knocked out due to the hurricane, making communication to and from the island to family and friends practically non-existent; and

WHEREAS, According to Governor Ricardo Rossello about 97% of the island's 3.4 million residents are still without power, others without running water, as supplies are slowly trickling in through the battered ports and airports. Gasoline and diesel for generators are being heavily rationed but are running out throughout the island which are necessary for patients on dialysis, ventilators, and generators for hospitals; and

WHEREAS, Hurricane Maria to date has killed 16 people in Puerto Rico with the death toll likely to rise as people lack medical care, with only two to three days of medical supplies left, a small supply of drinking water, and lack of cooling units essential to keep the sick and elderly in stable condition; and

WHEREAS, At last count over 14,000 people were living in shelters, not including the thousands of homeless who have moved in with family. Eighty percent of Puerto Rico's crops have also been destroyed amounting to a \$780 million dollar hit to the island's agriculture industry; and

WHEREAS, The Trump Administration approved a disaster declaration for 54 of the 78 municipalities on the island, which would allow parts of the affected population to only receive aid from FEMA for first responders and eventually will limit what they will receive from a future allocation for supplies and rebuilding; and

WHEREAS, Hurricane Maria breached and destroyed a part of the Guajataca dam, located between the municipalities of San Sebastian and Quebradillas at Guajataca Lake, endangering the lives of seventy thousand individuals living near the dam. Those living near the dam were not included in the disaster declaration from the Trump Administration; and

WHEREAS, We ask that President Donald Trump, the United States Congress, and its leadership in the House and Senate immediately take the following measures, which will have an impact on the lives of the 3.4 million American citizens in Puerto Rico; and

WHEREAS, We as the City Council of Philadelphia join the United States Senators, under the leadership of

Senator Casey, Senator Schumer and nine other Senators, in their request for the immediate waiver of the “Jones Act” and urge the President and Congress for an immediate allocation to FEMA for Puerto Rico, rather than waiting for an analysis or report to allocate immediate funding. We need the Army Corps of Engineers to take the lead on the potential breach of the Guajataca Dam and need the Navy to deploy ships for the potential removal of individuals who are sick and need immediate health services; and

WHEREAS, Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY) led fellow Members of Congress (Luis V. Gutiérrez, José E. Serrano, Darren Soto, Adriano Espaillat, Joyce Beatty and Joe Crowley) in writing to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security calling for tangible steps to accelerate Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria. The lawmakers are requesting that the Jones Act be temporarily waived in order to expedite supplies being shipped into the Island's ports. Additionally, the letter asks that Puerto Rico be exempted from requirements that local resources match federal funds expended by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); and

WHEREAS, Under the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 otherwise known as the “Jones Act” any foreign registry vessel that enters Puerto Rico must pay tariffs, fees and taxes, which are passed onto the Puerto Rican consumer. We urge the President and Congress to enact a temporary Jones Act Waiver for Puerto Rico to allow it to have more access to oil needed for its power plants, food, medicines, clothing, and building supplies; and

WHEREAS, We need to deploy, under a single flag, U.S. military officer, logistics, communication and engineering assets to help remove debris, clear roads, and ensure that areas that have been cut off receive the help they need at once. We urge Congress and the President to deploy more U.S. military personnel to help preserve law and order, ensure relief supplies are delivered to those most in need, and protect Puerto Ricans from crime and looting; and

WHEREAS, Eliminate the formula for Puerto Rico’s Federal ceiling on Medicaid and replace it with a per capita cap on par with those being proposed in current health reform bills. The Affordable Care Act block grant for Puerto Rico will be depleted this year. Unless there is an influx of funds, 900,000 Puerto Ricans who qualified for funding before Hurricane Maria may no longer have access to health care; and

WHEREAS, Today, September 28, 2017 at a press conference at City Hall, Philadelphia’s Delegation, along with Mayor James Kenney, Unidos PA’PR, and other state and local leaders will stand together to call for immediate action to address short term needs and begin Puerto Rico’s long recovery; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE CITY COUNCIL OF PHILADELPHIA, Urges President Donald Trump, the United States Congress, and its leadership at the House and Senate to act quickly in their federal relief efforts to assist the over 3.4 million United States citizens who live in Puerto Rico following the devastation of Hurricane Maria on September 20, 2017. While we appreciate President Trump’s planned visit to Puerto Rico on Tuesday, October 3rd, we cannot wait until Tuesday and need immediate action now.