

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 13, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20501

Mr. President:

We ask that you immediately approve the requested major disaster declaration made by the Puerto Rican government on January 12th and that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Planning (HUD) respond to the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico, and release the funds Congress previously approved for disaster relief.

It is unconscionable that since December 28th, the people of Puerto Rico have been dealing with hundreds of earthquakes and aftershocks—just two years after being ravaged by Hurricane Maria. The hurricane devastated the island and today, tens of thousands of people are still living under tarp roofs. In recent days, the quakes have cost millions in damages, destroyed hundreds of homes, caused widespread electricity blackouts, and forced residents to resort to sleeping in roofless shelters due to the fear of being buried in their own homes by another earthquake.

Officials estimate that 70% of the island's structures were built before quake-resistant building codes were enacted. Yet, HUD is currently withholding \$18 billion in disaster funding which Congress had approved for Puerto Rico.

We call on you to direct FEMA to fully extend federal resources under the most expansive reading of the disaster declaration you approved on January 7th and any future major disaster declaration to help families avoid any further unnecessary injury or death. FEMA should also be coordinating with the United States Geological Survey to help alert families in English and Spanish regarding ongoing or future threats from seismic activity.

Let us be clear: Postponing the disbursement of this vital assistance any longer—in the face of the humanitarian needs of Puerto Rico—is simply shameful. We additionally seek your explanation for this delay by January 20th.


Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Nydia Velázquez
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Honorable Peter Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency