

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 1, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Majority Leader McConnell:

We write to you regarding our grave concerns about the ongoing healthcare crisis in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. To prevent a deepening of the current public health crisis and avoid further fatalities in the U.S. territories we need to ensure that our fellow Americans from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are able to access the healthcare and coverage they need. This means providing the appropriate Medicaid funding and flexibility to both the U.S. territories and the states receiving individuals displaced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria so those affected are able to receive healthcare services.

In the same fashion as the federal Medicaid matching rate was raised for the state of Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, Congress must act to temporarily increase the federal Medicaid matching rate for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to 100 percent. This will help sustain the underlying program and address the higher demands that Hurricanes Irma and Maria created. This also recognizes that Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands do not have the capacity to provide matching funds to draw down federal dollars under Medicaid as a result of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the U.S. territories.

In addition, Congress must take steps to ensure that evacuees can receive Medicaid services in the states where they were forced to relocate. This is especially important because many with serious health conditions had no choice but to leave the U.S. territories in order to continue their treatments given that Puerto Rico's and the U.S. Virgin Islands' infrastructure was so heavily damaged by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Congress should provide full reimbursement for the cost of services provided to dislocated individuals. There is precedent for such action – after Hurricane Katrina, states that hosted evacuees from Louisiana were held harmless for Medicaid costs to provide these individuals and families with coverage.

Moreover, in order to streamline eligibility and enrollment processes, Congress should allow self-attestation of eligibility factors for those from the U.S. territories as has been permitted in previous crises such as Hurricane Katrina. Given the devastation, in many cases, Americans from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands will not have documents to support their applications because they lack access to them, for example, because they were destroyed as a result of the storms. In addition, letting Puerto Rico's and the U.S. Virgin Islands' Medicaid agencies temporarily use abbreviated application forms and delay scheduled redeterminations of Medicaid eligibility would help residents who are temporarily displaced and experience delays in receiving and responding to requests sent by mail. Delaying redeterminations can also give

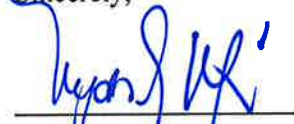
agencies more time to handle the likely higher volume of new applicants. New York City took similar steps after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

Even before Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the U.S. territories faced severe healthcare funding challenges and shortfalls in part because healthcare spending exceeded the capped Medicaid allotment provided by the federal government. Congress engaged in bipartisan negotiations to address these shortfalls to aid the U.S. territories' ability to provide healthcare to their communities. In fact, before Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit, Congress acted at least twice to provide additional funding to address this ongoing healthcare issue.


Once again, we urge action to raise available Medicaid funding and continue to negotiate on a long term structural fix that will address these issues. This will be essential to promoting economic recovery and future growth in the U.S. territories. However, it is important to recognize that without providing a temporary 100 percent federal Medicaid match, even if the caps are lifted, the U.S. territories are unlikely to be able to access such funds given their current inability to provide matching funds to draw down this essential federal funding.


We ask that you work immediately to address these issues. We have a duty to our fellow Americans to ease their suffering and prevent further harm in the midst of such a devastating crisis.

Sincerely,


  
Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

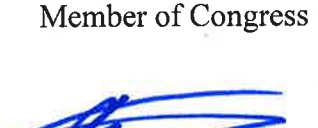
  
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