

January 23, 2018

Senator Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senator Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

The undersigned organizations strongly support the bipartisan [request](#) for the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to hold hearings to assess and address the ongoing education and health crisis in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands from the destructive hurricanes Irma and Maria.

It has been well over 100 days since the hurricanes made landfall, and American citizens are still struggling to regain basic living essentials. While some progress has been made, the U.S. territories are not only in recovery mode, their citizens are fighting to survive.

As we all witnessed in September, the U.S. Virgin Islands were hit with two Category 5 hurricanes over 12 days, with the second hurricane also making landfall as a Category 4 in Puerto Rico. Families still live in destroyed homes with blue tarps as partial, temporary roofing, while others are living in shelters and many have left the islands for the mainland. In Puerto Rico, schools and an unknown number of businesses are still closed, hospitals are still not fully functioning, and there are still long lines for water and ice.<sup>1</sup> At the end of 2017, Gov. Ricardo Rossello stated that more than 660,000 Puerto Ricans were living without power, which is estimated to be 45 percent of the island's 1.5 million electricity customers. Based on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates, full power restoration for Puerto Rico could take until May, right before the hurricane season of 2018 is set to begin.<sup>2</sup> In the U.S. Virgin Islands, it is estimated that half the electric customers remain without power, about one-quarter of the territory is without cellphone service, and thousands of homes, businesses and other buildings were damaged or destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

Progress toward recovery for health and education systems is slow-moving, especially without the basic infrastructure of safe water and electricity, without access to food and safe housing, and with hazards such as long-standing water, diseases and infections. Some groups, such as individuals with disabilities, are especially vulnerable. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, nine schools were completely destroyed. Due to the significant damage to the hospitals, all patients are still being medevacked to the mainland.<sup>4</sup> Puerto Rico has reopened 1,100 of the nearly 1,200 schools, with 38 being closed for structural damage, serving

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/puerto-rico-crisis/anger-grows-hope-fades-puerto-rico-s-ground-zero-remains-n833421>

<sup>2</sup><https://qz.com/1169714/hurricane-maria-half-of-puerto-rico-still-doesnt-have-power/>

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.tampabay.com/news/world/Recovering-what-was-lost-in-the-U-S-Virgin-Islands-one-boat-at-a-time\\_163722489](http://www.tampabay.com/news/world/Recovering-what-was-lost-in-the-U-S-Virgin-Islands-one-boat-at-a-time_163722489)

<sup>4</sup><https://www.marketplace.org/2017/12/28/economy/rebuilding-plays-major-role-recovery-us-virgin-islands>

approximately 331,000 students. Many of these schools opened without access to power.<sup>5</sup> Higher education institutions on the islands are similarly struggling to recover and serve students. Puerto Rico's largest hospital only has one of the five floors operational due to damage. As the process continues at its slow pace, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are losing medical personnel, educators and families from the territories.

A focus of 2018 needs to be about rebuilding Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, but we need to ensure the Americans living there are safe and have the resources for basic living essentials. Families, individuals and businesses want to begin to be able to rebuild, have a safe home, go to work and school, and have access to safe drinking water and a doctor when they become ill. The Americans of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands desperately need help, and having access to public education and healthcare is essential to the recovery.

We ask for your committee to begin hearings on these issues immediately so that the full range of needs can be met for every U.S. citizen affected by hurricanes Irma and Maria. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

AASA  
Action Ridge  
AFSCME  
AIDS United  
All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church  
Alliance for Excellent Education  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)  
American Association of People with Disabilities  
American Federation of School Administrators  
American Federation of Teachers  
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee  
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO  
Asociacion de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR)  
ASPIRA Association  
Association of Flight Attendants - CWA  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities  
AUCD  
Augustana Lutheran Church of Hyde Park  
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore  
Benedictine Sisters of Chicago  
Benedictine Sisters of Virginia  
Berkeley Friends Church  
Boricua Vota

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<sup>5</sup>[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2017/12/puerto\\_rico\\_schools\\_reopened\\_enrollment\\_dropped.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2017/12/puerto_rico_schools_reopened_enrollment_dropped.html)

Carter-McGowan Services, LLC  
Catholic Charities of Buffalo  
Catholic Charities of Chicago  
Center for American Progress  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Chicago Teachers Union  
Citizens Education Project  
Coalition on Human Needs  
coasap  
Coastal Bend Center for Independent Living  
Collaborative Center for Justice  
Communications Workers of America (CWA)  
Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley  
Community Resource Exchange  
CWA Local 1082  
D.C. Hunger Solutions  
Dedham Junior Women's Club  
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families  
DEMOCRATS ABOARD  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO  
Doctors for America  
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids  
Earthjustice  
Ebenezer Baptist Church  
EDGE Consulting LLC  
Education Law Center  
Education Rights Network  
Emmanuel United Presbyterian Church  
Erie Benedictines for Peace  
Faith Organizing Alliance  
Families USA  
Florida Alliance of CDCs  
Food For All  
Franciscan Sisters of the Poor  
Friends of the Earth  
Frontier Nursing University  
Gamaliel Network  
Generation Progress  
Global Alliance Interfaith Networks  
Global Justice Institute  
GLSEN  
Grace Lutheran Church  
Grand St Settlement  
Greater Miami Service Corps  
Greater New York Labor Religion Coalition  
Hawaii Public Charter Schools Network

HEAL-ONLINE.ORG (HEAL)  
Hedge Clippers  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Hispanic Alliance, inc.  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)  
Hispanic Federation  
Illinois Association of Multilingual Multicultural Education  
Iniciativa Acción Puertorriqueña  
Integrated Community Solutions  
Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)  
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers  
International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE)  
Journey for Justice Alliance  
Justice in Aging  
Justice Now!  
KS CHAPTER OF NAN  
LCLAA  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
Learning Forward  
LORETTO COMMUNITY  
Make the Road CT  
MamásConPoder  
Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO  
Maryland United for Peace and Justice  
MEBA  
Metropolitan Community Churches  
Mi Familia Vota  
MICAH- Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing  
Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network  
MomsRising  
Morgan State University  
Mt. Carmel Missionary Baptist Church  
Musikanten Montana  
NAACP  
NAACP Lake-Newaygo Branch 3144  
NABSE  
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)  
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)  
National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE)  
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)  
National Association for Multicultural Education  
National Association of Bilingual Education  
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)  
National Black Justice Coalition  
National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Consumer Law Center  
National Council for Languages and International Studies  
National Council of Gray Panthers Networks  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Domestic Violence Hotline  
National Education Association  
National Federation of Federal Employees  
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators  
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
National Migrant Seasonal Head Start Association (NMSHSA)  
National Network to End Domestic Violence  
National Organization for Women  
National PTA  
National Puerto Rican Agenda  
National School Boards Association  
National Urban League  
National WIC Association  
New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.  
New York Communities for Change  
Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity  
OPKC  
Our Spring Lake Store LLC  
Oxfam  
Peace X Peace Women's Group  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network  
Phelps  
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts)  
PIIN  
Pittsburgh LCLAA  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary  
Population Connection Action Fund  
Pride at Work  
Public Health  
Public Justice Center  
Puerto Rico Equality Forum  
Puerto Rico Institute on Developmental Disabilities (PR-UCEDD)  
Schott Foundation  
Seafarers International Union  
Service Employees International Union  
Sisters of Mercy  
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community Justice Team  
Sisters of St Francis  
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, NY  
Sisters of St. Joseph

SocioEnergetics Foundation  
TASH  
Teaching for Change  
The Allin Congregational Church, UCC  
The Arc of the United States  
The Badass Teachers Association, Inc.  
The Bingham Program  
The Joint National Committee for Languages  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Toledo Area Jobs with Justice & Interfaith Worker Justice Coalition  
Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)  
Unitarian Universalist Escalating Economic Inequality Task Force - Southeast Michigan  
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute  
Wisconsin Council of Churches  
YWCA Alliance