

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

June 10, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer:

As you negotiate future related relief packages for the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, we would like to call your attention to the *Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act*<sup>1</sup> and urge you to consider its importance to the immediate health and safety of thousands of households across the country, the efficacy of our nation's disaster housing relief programs, the ultimate success of ongoing recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and other parts of the country, and the responsiveness to future disasters as we enter hurricane season.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated and exasperated longstanding financial, health, and housing inequities among the American public, as well as the persistent inequities between those in our territories and in the mainland United States. As you know, many of the inequities in Puerto Rico are fresh, stemming from the devastating impact of hurricanes Maria and Irma in 2017. Likewise, we are confident that you are aware of the sometimes unnecessarily bureaucratic nature of the housing relief programs we employ following natural disasters, including those provided in the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance (Stafford) Act*.<sup>2</sup>

To this day, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and Trump administration's apprehension to augment, support, and dutifully employ the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) is having a disastrous effect on the people of Puerto Rico.<sup>3</sup> In response to a *Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA) request submitted by Oxfam, FEMA provided a portrait of an inexcusably prohibitive and archaic process that left tens of thousands of households without the aid they needed and deserved.<sup>4</sup> Many of the administrative burdens this program placed in front of victims would be addressed by our legislation, ensuring such a

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<sup>1</sup> Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act of 2019, S. 1605, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1605>; Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act of 2019, H.R. 2914, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2914>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law 93-288.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Senator Warren, "Warren, Espailat, Colleagues Reintroduce Legislation to Provide Stable Housing for Survivors of Natural Disasters," May 22, 2019, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-espailat-colleagues-reintroduce-legislation-to-provide-stable-housing-for-survivors-of-natural-disasters>.

<sup>4</sup> Freedom of Information Act Request Response from the Federal Emergency Management Administration to Oxfam International.

mismatch between federal relief and its intended recipients in the wake of a catastrophic disaster does not happen again.<sup>5</sup>

We hope you share our belief that the sooner we act to improve our nation's disaster response programs, the better prepared we will be as we enter this year's hurricane season. So we reiterate our request that you work to include the *Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act* in future relief packages under consideration in the Senate.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> Office of Senator Warren, "Warren, Espaillat, Colleagues Reintroduce Legislation to Provide Stable Housing for Survivors of Natural Disasters," May 22, 2019, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-espaillat-colleagues-reintroduce-legislation-to-provide-stable-housing-for-survivors-of-natural-disasters>.