



THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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ADRIENNE E. ADAMS
SPEAKER

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September 26, 2022

Hon. Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Hon. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Charles Schumer, Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear President Biden, Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer:

We are writing to you in support of important steps that the federal government can take to help Puerto Rico in its recovery from the devastating effects of Hurricane Fiona. Specifically, we write on behalf of the New York City Council in support of requests that you create a waiver to the Jones Act in Puerto Rico, which can help allow the island to rebuild.

As you know, New York City has a special relationship to Puerto Rico, with the largest population of people of Puerto Rican descent of any city on U.S. mainland. Many of us have direct relationships to the islands, with family and close friends living there. Our people on Puerto Rico were yet to fully recover from Hurricane Maria, which ravaged the territory five years ago and led to nearly 3,000 people dying, when Hurricane Fiona hit.

The territory was still struggling to rebuild essential infrastructure when this latest hurricane hit, and it has further eroded basic utilities that were never fully rebuilt in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Puerto Ricans today face ongoing power outages, a lack of access to clean drinking water, and a massive clean-up effort to rebuild roads and homes impacted by floods and landslides.

As the territory tries to again start rebuilding its basic utilities, the federal government should do all it can to support these efforts. We believe that a waiver of the Jones Act can help facilitate the necessary delivery of food, medicines and building materials to Puerto Rico.

When Hurricane Maria barraged the territory five years ago, the assistance efforts from the Trump administration were inadequate and disappointing. However, even the former President recognized the barrier that the Jones Act created to a speedy recovery and authorized a waiver.

We recognize that the intent of the Jones Act is to protect the Country's vital shipping industry, but it is clear that in times of emergencies, a waiver is the best option. We know that you understand this balance because you authorized waivers last year in an effort to address the fuel supply shortage.

A waiver for Puerto Rico during this time will allow a faster and cheaper supply of essentials to reach the islands. Their isolation from the mainland of the country makes rebuilding particularly difficult and expensive and so we should do everything in our power to mitigate these issues.

We were reassured by the prompt emergency declaration for Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona. This enabled the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to mobilize and immediately begin providing support. We believe that the next step is to offer a waiver to the Jones Act so that additional resources can be fully utilized.

Additionally, we urge that FEMA ease any unnecessary red tape that will slow the pace of recovery and support for the people of Puerto Rico, as well as ensure an equitable response. FEMA's own data has shown disparities in assistance¹ for low-income, Black and Latino disaster survivors. Administrative burdens and requirements often present the greatest barriers to communities that are least able to overcome them to access aid. It is important that assistance and recovery funds be released quickly to those in greatest need without excessive bureaucratic burdens.

We appreciate your compassion and fortitude in determining how best to support Puerto Rico during this devastating time and eagerly await your decision. If we can be of further assistance, we remain ready to support these and other efforts to help the people of Puerto Rico recover in an equitable and sustainable manner.

Sincerely,



ADRIENNE E. ADAMS
Speaker



DIANA AYALA
Deputy Speaker



RAFAEL SALAMANCA JR.
Council Member

¹ Herscher, Rebecca and Kellman, Ryan. "Why FEMA Aid is Unavailable to Many Who Need it Most." NPR News. June 21, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/29/1004347023/why-fema-aid-is-unavailable-to-many-who-need-it-the-most>



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Council Member



TIFFANY CABÁN
Council Member



ALEXA AVILÉS
Council Member

cc: New York City Congressional Delegation
Hon. Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security