

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5400

August 17, 2022

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
451 7th ST. SW
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge:

We write to ask for your swift consideration of the Puerto Rico Department of Housing's (Vivienda) request for a waiver to authorize the use of Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds as the non-Federal match to support the reconstruction and rehabilitation of houses of worship. We understand Vivienda submitted this request directly to Marion M. McFadden, HUD Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, earlier this month and is expecting a response from the agency.

The Non-Federal Match Program, operated by Vivienda, is one of the multiple CDBG-DR programs available on the Island for disaster recovery. Through this program, constituents may request the use of funds to cover the non-federal portion required by disaster programs offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. As you know firsthand from your visits to the Island, the people of Puerto Rico have suffered extraordinarily from the damage inflicted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria and subsequent earthquakes. Houses of worship provide essential services before, during and after the natural disasters which Puerto Rico has experienced with increasing frequency and intensity. These are places of refuge and a source of food, support, and distribution of supplies when storms hit. Unfortunately, a substantial number remain in disrepair and in desperate need of reconstruction, yet they do not have the financial means to cover any of the non-federal match requirements.

The Department's Office of Community Planning and Development has previously denied Vivienda's request for this waiver and has suggested seeking reimbursement pursuant to the proportionality standard. However, we understand HUD has yet to promulgate the guidance on allocation of cost and other calculations needed to implement its proportionality standard and are concerned that this action could take an extended period for the agency to develop and later provide the thorough guidance which Vivienda would need to comply with the existing standard of 24 CFR 5.109(j).

Vivienda is submitting a third waiver request to allow the use of CDBG-DR funds, through the Non-Federal Match Program, to cover damages sustained by houses of worship. The first two

requests, the first submitted over a year ago, have been denied and yet the need for assistance for these crucial stakeholders remains. While we are mindful of HUD's regulations and the limitations that exist to prevent the use of federal resources to fund religious purposes, we also understand you have the authority to waive the application of such policy in instances of good cause to do so. We believe this opportunity to be one of these instances and that Vivienda can and has shown good cause. Further we believe any additional delays by HUD, such as waiting on guidance, could cause additional harm to the recovery. We applaud your efforts thus far and strongly encourage you to personally address this issue quickly to provide much needed support to the Island.

Please consider this request in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

Sincerely,



Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress