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

March 29, 2022

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge:

I write to respectfully request your assistance with some of the issues confronting my constituents related with access to Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) funds and income limits for housing programs managed by your department.

The Puerto Rico Department of Housing (Vivienda), grantee of CDBG-DR funds on the Island, operates the Non-Federal Match Program (program), which has an allotment of \$1.5 billion and covers costs associated with matching funds for selected Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs. It has come to my attention that this program has generated significant interest from Faith-based organizations, which have partnered with FEMA to rebuild some of their damaged structures.

On July 14, 2021, Vivienda submitted a waiver request to 24 CFR 5.109 (e) and (j) to allow the program to provide the required cost share of Faith-based organization projects, regardless of the time and location of explicitly religious activities and whether these were offered separately. The request, if granted, would also allow CDBG-DR funds to be used to pay for the share of acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation costs for these projects.

Damages from Hurricane Maria impeded the immediate deployment of most state and municipal officials to affected communities. In many cases, faith-based organizations, mostly churches and places of worship, were the first ones to reach residents to account for their wellbeing, the state of the homes and belongings, as well as their needs. Many churches served as shelters before, during and after the hurricane, and were used to store supplies for distribution. As such, they were an ally to local authorities as they resumed operations in the aftermath of the disaster.

Faith-based organizations also sustained great infrastructure losses and damages. Now they need a partner in the federal government to rebuild the structures that continue to support my constituents. It is my understanding that HUD has the authority to grant the mentioned waiver to Vivienda. However, the request was denied in November 2021. I respectfully request you reconsider this request and thus allow greater access to Faith-based organizations in the Non-Federal Match program.

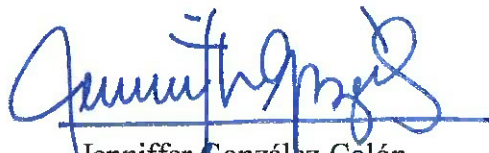
I would like to also request your assistance with reviewing income limits for housing programs in Puerto Rico and how the current limits are impacting the participation of constituents. During the Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations process, I requested the following report language, included in House Report 117-99, to help us assess how income limits might be keeping constituents from participating based on income eligibility:

“Housing income limits for Puerto Rico. —The Committee encourages the Department to work with relevant Federal stakeholders and the government of Puerto Rico to review current income limits used to determine eligibility for affordable Federal housing programs in Puerto Rico. The Committee further encourages the Department’s assessment on how these income limits may be affecting the participation of low-income individuals and developers in Federal housing programs, indicate if they are a hinderance in participation, and identify ways to potentially remedy this issue.”¹

Any assistance from the Department with an assessment on how income limits for Puerto Rico impact program participation would be most helpful. I trust that examining this issue further will yield greater clarity on how to better serve constituents in Puerto Rico and support their needs, as intended by federal housing programs.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. Please consider these requests in accordance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

Sincerely,



Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress

¹Report 117-99. Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2022. <https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt99/CRPT-117hrpt99.pdf>