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

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September 29, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

Hurricane Fiona made landfall in Puerto Rico on September 19, 2022, one day shy of the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria's landfall in Puerto Rico. During the 48 hours in which the rains associated with Hurricane Fiona battered the territorial extension of Puerto Rico, the approximate volume of Lake Pontchartrain fell upon soil already heavily saturated by the excessive rainfalls of the previous month. Hurricane Fiona was not Hurricane Maria, but to some extent, it was worse.

Puerto Rico suffered a complete blackout during the storm, also affecting the Island's water utility. After two days of around-the-clock efforts to restore power, only about 20% the Island's households got power back and about 55% had running water. Today, about 90% of the power has been restored, yet in some areas it is likely going to take months. While some of the flooding that occurred during Hurricane Maria reoccurred, many parts of Puerto Rico which had not suffered flooding during Maria were overrun with water. Bridges that were the only access to certain communities, rebuilt after Hurricane Maria, were again washed away. Other communities were left isolated by mudslides and transportation has been severely impaired by impassable roads and roads that no longer exist.

Federal agencies have quickly responded and are currently assessing the damages and determining how best to help. However, there are areas in which Congress, alone, can and must act; one of these areas is healthcare funding.

The precarious fiscal health of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is no secret. Although strides have been made in the past few years, the natural disasters that have struck Puerto Rico in the past 5 years— Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, the 2019-20 earthquakes, the COVID-19 public health emergency— have maintained the government in a constant state of emergency. Federal assistance has been an invaluable component of the recovery process. However, the destruction caused by Hurricane Fiona will require the Government of Puerto Rico and its municipalities to incur in additional, unanticipated expenses.

In order to alleviate the financial burden on the Government of Puerto Rico and foster a healthy reconstruction process from the devastation caused by Hurricane Fiona, I ask Congress to temporarily increase the 1108 Medicaid allotment cap to \$5 billion for each of the next two fiscal years and, like it did in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, to raise the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) for Puerto Rico's Medicaid program to 100%. I further ask support for an increase to the 1108 Medicaid allotment cap to \$21.5 billion and to raise the FMAP to 83% to provide for the federal funding required to finance Puerto Rico's Medicaid Program from FY25 to FY30. Having certainty in the future of our Medicaid program, that serves over 1.5 million Americans on the Island, will allow the Government of Puerto Rico to redirect the funds it currently uses to match the federal healthcare program to assist the reconstruction process. It will also allow the Puerto Rico Medicaid program to provide additional benefits which are crucial at this point, such as non-emergency transportation, adult vaccinations, diabetes supplies, and fairer rates to healthcare providers struggling to maintain their offices open in the face of this additional adversity.

I also ask Congress to provide additional funding for our 21 federal community health centers. Eighty-six percent of the patients served by community health centers in Puerto Rico have incomes below 100% of the federal poverty guidelines, as compared to 61% nationally. In addition, 67% of these patients are insured by Medicaid and CHIP, (as compared to 53%, nationally) which, because of the inherent deficiencies in our Medicaid funding, seriously restricts their sources of income. The number of patients served by these centers in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria increased almost 20% (in contrast to the 20% decrease experienced nationally during that same period), an increase is likewise expected in the economic and social conditions following Hurricane Fiona.¹

Finally, I ask Congress to provide additional funding for mental health screening, case management, and mobile crisis services for communities affected by Hurricane Fiona. Many of the residents of Puerto Rico are still dealing the psychological scars of Hurricane

¹ HEALTH RESOURCES & SERVICES ADMINISTRATION. *Puerto Rico Health Center Program Uniform Data System (UDS) Data Five-Year Summary*, available at <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/data-reporting/program-data/state/PR>.

Maria and the recent earthquakes, and many feel like they just cannot find the heart to start anew again, after having lost everything only five years ago.

After Hurricane Maria, Congress made a great effort to stabilize Puerto Rico's healthcare system. That investment bore fruit and, today, Puerto Rico has a substantially more robust healthcare system that it had prior to 2017. I ask Congress, in this time of extraordinary need, to provide Puerto Rico with the tools to continue running a sustainable, stable Medicaid program which meets the needs of its most vulnerable populations and contributes to the well-being of the Island's' healthcare system.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, reading "Jenniffer González-Colón". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a prominent horizontal line across the middle.

Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress