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

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The Honorable Eloy S. Inos
Governor
Commonwealth of the
Northern Mariana Islands
Caller Box 10007
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Governor Inos:

I understand the challenges you face during this period of disaster relief and recovery, and appreciate the hard work of the many Commonwealth government employees who are themselves victims of Typhoon Soudelor.

But I cannot be quiet, while hundreds of people who desperately need food assistance – and who should be qualified for such aid in this state of disaster - are being denied by the Nutritional Assistance Program.

The Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has authorized you to spend all of the \$3.5 million in surplus food stamp funds you were granted for fiscal 2015.

The Food and Nutrition Service has also authorized you to open up eligibility for food stamps to any household in the Northern Marianas with an income up to four times the normal income required to receive food stamps. This increased eligibility is provided for in the NAP Manual of Operations, Exhibit D, Chapter II(C). This means, for instance, that a household of four with a monthly income less than \$3,732 should be eligible for assistance.

The Food and Nutrition Service has informed me, however, that the Commonwealth government has decided not to increase income eligibility and that only those households that meet the normal NAP income guidelines are being given emergency food stamps. As a result, people in need are being turned away.

Governor, there may be factors of which I am not aware that led to the Commonwealth's decision not to use the \$3.5 million in federal funds and its existing authority to allow households with higher incomes to get food stamps in this disaster. Perhaps the concern is that the Commonwealth government does not yet know what the total demand for assistance will be and that available funds may be insufficient.

What we do know is this: Acting Governor Ralph Torres and Department of Community and Cultural Affairs Secretary Laura Ogumoro submitted a cost estimate to FNS with their original application to implement Emergency Food Assistance pursuant to Part XI and Exhibit D of the NAP Manual of Operations. They estimated that, if every single household in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands applied for one month of emergency food assistance, the cost would be \$6,445,150.

Based on that estimate it would be possible to provide every household with one-half of a month's assistance at a cost of \$3,222,575. This is well within your available budget of \$3.5 million. Furthermore, not every household would be eligible under the four times normal income requirement.

If the Commonwealth's decision is indeed to not use the resources available to help more people who lost food in the typhoon, I implore you to reconsider. You have the money. You have the authority. And here we are over two weeks after the typhoon struck and so many of our people are hungry.

Since Typhoon Soudelor hit, I have been in constant communication with FNS to expedite the approval of funds for emergency food assistance. I have also strongly encouraged FNS to send technical assistance to support implementation of the disaster benefits program, given the public demand we anticipated and the limited resources of the NAP office. Today I was glad to learn from FNS Regional Administrator Jesus Mendoza that he will be dispatching program and financial management staff to Saipan next week.

If there is anything else I can do to help the Commonwealth government make emergency food stamps available to more people in need, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress