Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

On September 20th, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands endured a direct impact from Hurricane Maria. With winds up to 160 mph, Hurricane Maria devastated these islands, caused significant power outages, destroyed telecommunications infrastructure, and thereby paralyzed the region. Given the impact of the damage and the population of 3.6 million American citizens affected, we are concerned that federal efforts to date have been insufficient to address the severity of the situation. We know there are DOD elements helping today, and all the service members involved are working very hard, but we are concerned that the scale of DOD assets supporting the operation are inadequate. Thus, we write to urge you to further mobilize the Department of Defense to immediately deploy additional assets in support of Puerto Rican and U.S. Virgin Island recovery efforts.

As you know, the Department of Defense has additional capabilities that could help alleviate suffering in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and prevent this catastrophe from worsening. First and foremost, a senior general officer must be appointed to work with FEMA to manage a joint response assist with the recovery effort on the ground, and enable local constituencies to have a single point of contact. This was done in response to Hurricane Katrina, and we feel the same approach is warranted now for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

As we are sure you are aware, in both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, there are numerous municipalities that are inaccessible from the ground, which is where DOD engineer and aviation assets would be most helpful. With millions of U.S. citizens stranded in remote areas without basic necessities, engineers are needed first to clear the roads. Additional aviation assets are needed to get relief supplies to isolated locations. Additionally, substantial ground and air logistics support is required to get aid to the islands, rescue stranded citizens, and provide them with supplies and thereafter assist with the restoration of power and telecommunications infrastructure if needed. To fulfill DOD's mission, we believe the aircraft carrier, *USS Abraham Lincoln*, should be sent to the region, similar to its deployment to Miami following Hurricane Irma.

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DHS has indicated it has "provided more than 1.5 million meals, 1.1 million liters of water, nearly 300 infant and toddler kits, and nearly 12,000 emergency roofing kits to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria's landfall." While these meals and resources are profoundly needed, unfortunately, there is a large portion of the population that has been underserved.

Lastly, DOD has critical resources that could assist with addressing security issues. We have heard reports that the ongoing supply shortages are causing looting and crime. We were recently informed of armed gangs ransacking a warehouse that distributes food and supplies. Defense Department personnel could provide essential support to local law enforcement in both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to ensure relief supplies are delivered to those most in need– and that those that have already been immensely devastated by the hurricane, do not need to fear for their lives when filling up their gas at the pump or securing food for their family.

We thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable James Mattis, Secretary of Defense

Elijah E. Cummings

Lloyd Doggett

Jim McGovern

Frank Pallone Jr.

[illegible]

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Michael E. Capuano

Nick Lampson

Frederica S. Wilson

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Betty McCollum

Ned Deutch

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Susan A. Davis

Peter Aguilar

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Gregory W. Meeks

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Brian Higgins

Grace F. Napolitano

Al Lawson

Joe Morelle

Joaquin Castro

Dwight Evans

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