



## **Judge Denies Preliminary Injunction for FEMA Aid for Hurricane Maria Evacuees**

*Extends Hotel Deadline to Midnight on Sept. 13, 2018 and urges FEMA to find housing Assistance for Plaintiffs prior to September 13th*

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Today, federal district Judge Timothy S. Hillman issued an order denying a request for a preliminary injunction to halt the evictions by FEMA of hundreds of Hurricane Maria evacuees still staying in hotels under the Temporary Shelter Assistance (TSA) program. Judge Hillman extended the temporary restraining order currently in place until September 13, 2018 (with checkout on September 14) to allow TSA recipients to transition into alternative housing.

The TSA program has been temporarily extended several times since it was set to expire on June 30, 2018, through a court order as a result of a class action lawsuit brought by LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, and the Law Office of Héctor Pineiro on behalf of approximately 2,000 disaster survivors who were forced to leave Puerto Rico after Hurricane María destroyed their homes and belongings. The survivors applied for and received TSA assistance throughout the United States, and have been actively trying to rebuild their lives, including securing housing. They have challenged FEMA's decision to evict them from hotels without extending any meaningful alternative housing assistance that FEMA has available and has chosen not to activate, essentially rendering them homeless. While today's ruling denies evacuees' request that they not be forcibly removed from their hotels until they can transition to safe alternative housing, FEMA's negligent and discriminatory treatment of, and response to, Hurricane Maria survivors has been exposed.

Today's decision acknowledges the extreme hardships faced by plaintiffs, who continue to face difficult and precarious situations. As Judge Hillman noted, "Plaintiffs are evacuees from a catastrophic natural disaster in which they have lost most, if not all, of their real and personal property and been forced to locate to areas thousands of miles away. At this point, the Plaintiffs and other potential class members who have not been transitioned into the THA program do not appear to have any place to go once the TSA program ends." FEMA has the chance now to heed these words and provide meaningful housing assistance to Hurricane Maria evacuees.

“While disappointing, today’s decision highlights the fact that FEMA has not provided survivors of Hurricane Maria with the housing assistance needed in order to rebuild their lives as evacuees. We hope that as the agency mandated to provide such relief to those who have suffered great harm and trauma, they will take the court up on its call to provide a morally correct outcome for TSA recipients,” said Natasha Lycia Ora Bannan, Associate Counsel at LatinoJustice PRLDEF.

“‘A nation’s greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members.’ (Mahatma Ghandi). We are disappointed with today’s District Court denial of the plaintiff’s request for a Preliminary Injunction. While we respectfully disagree with the decision, we appreciate that the court felt the law compelled its decision, while noting the hardships imposed on the Puerto Rican refugees by FEMA poor treatment of these citizens. The legal team representing the plaintiffs have succeeded in convincing the courts to require FEMA to extend housing to thousands of refugees far beyond the arbitrary date FEMA initially hoped to impose, June 30. We now hope that FEMA will heed the judge’s encouragement as expressed in his decision: ‘I strongly urge the parties to work together to find temporary housing, or other assistance to the Plaintiffs and other members of the class prior to (Sept 14, 2018).’ If it does so, it would act honorably and ethically by devoting serious effort to complete the housing transition for the few hundred remaining refugees that continue to be at risk of becoming homeless unless FEMA acts. That would be action consistent with a truly great nation,” said Craig de Recat, a partner at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips.

If you are a Hurricane Maria survivor and in need of assistance in any of the following areas, please contact the below agencies assisting with disaster relief response.

**New York:** New York Disaster Interfaith Services, [Imejia@nydis.org](mailto:Imejia@nydis.org)

**Florida:** Faith in Action, [dcollazo@faithinaction.org](mailto:dcollazo@faithinaction.org); & Vamos4Puerto Rico, [EGomez-Tejeda@seiu32bj.org](mailto:EGomez-Tejeda@seiu32bj.org)

**Massachusetts:** Faith in Action, [tlilienthal@faithinaction.org](mailto:tlilienthal@faithinaction.org)

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