

March 28, 2018

The Honorable Ricardo Rosselló
Office of Governor
La Fortaleza
P.O. Box 9020082
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00902-0082

The Honorable Ben Carson
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20410

To Governor Rosselló and Secretary Carson:

We write to express our deepest concerns that community stakeholders have not been provided a meaningful opportunity to consult with Puerto Rican officials as they craft their long-term disaster recovery plans. Public meetings held between March 5 and 10 were wholly inadequate and failed to provide key stakeholders with the opportunity to have their voices heard on issues that will directly impact their recovery and their communities, as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) February 9, 2018 notice allocating the disaster relief funding. We believe that additional forums and meetings for consultation with the public are necessary – in addition to assistance to help the public better understand HUD’s federal register notice – before any disaster recovery plan is submitted to HUD.

Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico and left thousands of families and communities without basic housing and infrastructure. However, in public meetings held between March 5 and 10, public stakeholders were not afforded a meaningful opportunity to consult with Puerto Rican officials about their specific needs and perspectives on long-term recovery. Few community leaders were made aware of the public meetings, and those individuals who did attend report that public officials left the room when community leaders were permitted to speak. Moreover, each public stakeholder was afforded only five minutes – half as much time as local government officials – to share their concerns about disaster recovery and their testimony was not recorded. To our knowledge, essentially all consultation has been with local governmental officials and with third-party contractors, and there has been little to no meaningful consultation with local community groups or civil rights and legal aid organizations.

Additional forums and meetings for consultation with the public are necessary so that local organizations and advocates can have direct input with Puerto Rican officials as they craft long-term disaster recovery plans. In addition, it is critical that local community leaders receive assistance to better understand HUD’s federal register notice. Communities and the public have a right to know and must have a voice in what their government plans to do to help survivors and their neighborhoods recover.

Sincerely,

Puerto Rican Organizations

Coalición de Coaliciones
Movimiento para el Alcance de Vida
Independiente (MAVI)
Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Planificación

National Organizations

Hispanic Federation
Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
National Low Income Housing Coalition
Oxfam America
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies
UnidosUS
Volunteers of America