

## Standing with Families from Puerto Rico Displaced by Hurricane Maria as They Fight for Permanent Housing Ahead of Final FEMA Deadline of June 30<sup>th</sup>

**WHAT WE'RE FACING:** Thousands of displaced people from Puerto Rico are facing homelessness after June 30<sup>th</sup>, the final FEMA/Red Cross deadline for the Transitional Housing Assistance (TSA) program, which has been paying for hotel rooms for these families after Maria (September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017). Some of these families have been living in hotels for over seven months. These families have nothing to return to on the island and no clear path to permanent housing here on the mainland. The federal government can help. There is a program called the Disaster Housing Assistance program (DHAP) that has been used following natural disasters in the past (Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike and Sandy). This program was designed to address the medium and longer-term housing needs of survivors of natural disasters. The program provides subsidies to help families pay rent, security deposits and utility payments. DHAP functions with an interagency agreement between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and FEMA. No Congressional action is needed to activate DHAP. HUD is ready to activate DHAP but FEMA has rejected requests to activate DHAP, including a request by Governor Rossello of Puerto Rico. Thousands of Americans from Puerto Rico will become homeless at the end of this month because of FEMA's inaction. This is unacceptable.

Members of Congress are now acting to activate DHAP through legislation. Senator Bill Nelson (FL) has introduced a bill and now Elizabeth Warren (MA) and Ed Markey (MA) have introduced a bill calling for the immediate activation of DHAP to address the urgent needs families are facing currently. Included are attachments about the Nelson and Warren/Markey bills in both English and Spanish.

**WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW:** Pioneer Valley Project, a grassroots community organization in Springfield, MA has been organizing displaced families in Western Massachusetts (the Springfield/Holyoke area has seen the highest proportion of evacuees in the state) still stuck in hotels for the last several months and the families have been pressuring Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey to act to prevent them from becoming homeless. Now that Warren and Markey have reacted by introducing legislation, approximately 100 people from the displaced families in Western Massachusetts are heading to Washington D.C. to share their stories with Congressional offices and push for immediate legislative action. The families will board buses Wednesday morning (June 6<sup>th</sup>) and return to Massachusetts on Thursday evening (June 7<sup>th</sup>).

### **ASKS OF INFLUENCERS:**

- 1) We would appreciate your support and participation with any and all of the action steps named below. We are asking you to use your public platform to help us to raise this urgent issue impacting thousands of Puerto Rican Americans. This issue had largely fallen out of the news cycle until last week when Harvard released a study which estimated the actual death toll on the island to be much higher than originally reported. You can read more about the study [here](#).
- 2) We are asking you to join us on social media and tweet about this issue, tweet in solidarity with the families who are going to D.C. as they fight for their lives and tweet calling on Congress to act legislatively to activate DHAP and calling on FEMA to activate DHAP immediately in the coming 15 days. Below are sample tweets and hashtags. Please ask other influencers you know to do the same.

**Hashtags-** #DHAPNow, #BoricuasSonAmericanos, #PuertoRicansAreAmericans, #CasaNoHoteles, #HomesNotHotels #HurricaneMaria

**Sample Tweets-** Thousands of #HurricaneMaria survivors from Puerto Rico will become homeless on June 30th. @pvpspringfield & I need your help to get @FEMA to take action. Call FEMA at 202-646-3900 and tell them to activate DHAP now.

I'm standing with displaced families from Puerto Rico and @pvpspringfield as they call on @FEMA to activate the Disaster Housing Assistance Program. Call FEMA at 202-646-3900 and tell them you want DHAP now.

Too many lives lost after #HurricaneMaria. Now thousands of people displaced from Puerto Rico will become homeless on June 30<sup>th</sup> across the US without our help. Join me and @pvpspringfield as we call on @FEMA to activate DHAP now.

Displaced families from Puerto Rico need our help or they will become homeless on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Join me and @pvpspringfield and contact your legislators and @FEMA and call for them to activate DHAP now.

- 3) We are inviting you to pitch and place an Op-Ed about this issue with local and national media outlets (we can provide a draft) in the next seven days; and
- 4) Finally, we also invite you request interviews with national media over the next ten days to discuss this issue and its urgency. We can assist with preparation, if needed.