

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 24, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
The White House Office of Management & Budget
725 17th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Secretary DeVos and Director Mulvaney:

As you work to craft US Department of Education recommendations for supplemental appropriations in the aftermath of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, we respectfully urge you to address the immediate and desperate needs of local educational agencies in the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. While migration from affected areas to the US mainland is expected, the Administration and Congress must do everything they can to bring stability to the impacted islands, including prioritizing relief and recovery efforts to ensure that students, teachers, and families have the resources necessary to live and learn safely in their communities.

More than 365,000 students and 40,000 educators and school personnel live and learn in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. More than two weeks after Hurricane Maria's landfall, less than 30 of Puerto Rico's 1,112 public schools had running water and basic supplies. Still, virtually none of the island's schools have electricity, and less than half have even been surveyed to assess the full scope of damage. Public schools in the US Virgin Islands are also struggling to resume regular classes.

Schools play a central role in these devastated communities. In addition to providing education, public schools serve as the hub of a neighborhood/community, adding to the urgency of providing assistance, so that school districts can open and staff can return as quickly as possible will bring normalcy to the places that need it most. It will also enable them to fulfill their fundamental mission of providing a high-quality education and a safe, welcoming environment to affected students.

It is essential that the Congress and administration provide a sizable and dedicated source of funds to address the immediate and long-term needs of children, school staff and schools in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. This should be done by building upon existing programs and structures to help schools meet the challenges they face including:

- Immediate financial assistance to restart school operations (such as the maintenance of payroll and other contractual obligations) in school districts hit hard by the hurricanes.
- Immediate financial assistance for initiating and maintaining education and support services for those school systems receiving students and families from evacuated areas in amount no less than the

receiving schools' average per pupil spending level, so that they may provide the appropriate educational, language, social, and mental health services to affected students.

- Flexibility to use federal financial assistance for capital costs of repairing and rebuilding schools and related facilities, as well as immediate financial assistance for such costs.
- Supplemental funding for McKinney-Vento programs to support those students who are dealing with homelessness as a result of the destructive hurricanes.
- Flexibility to allow all schools in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands to provide three free meals per day to all students for the remainder of this school year as is being done in Houston Independent School District.
- The maintenance of continuity of student aid, including Pell grants and loans for affected students for the current school year.
- The provision of extended grace period for repayment of student loans.
- Supplemental mental health services for students and staff most impacted by the storms.

While all local educational agencies in affected areas are in need of federal support in the aftermath of recent storms, the needs of students and staff in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands are especially pressing, because of the scope of devastation and lack of resources. While precise assessments may take time, we already know there will be long-term costs in school districts that will require much more federal assistance once sound estimates of the damage wrought by the hurricane are determined.

We urge you to work with Congress to ensure that the needs of students, families, and school staff are met through robust supplemental appropriations for public schools in Hurricane-impacted areas.

Sincerely,

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Ranking Member
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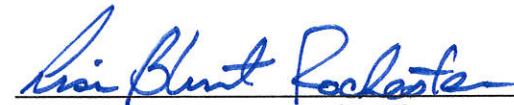
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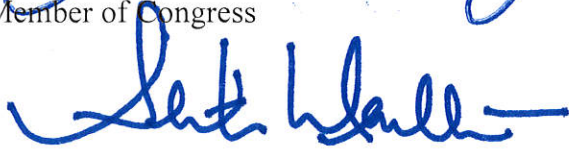
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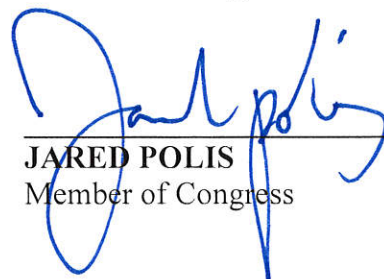
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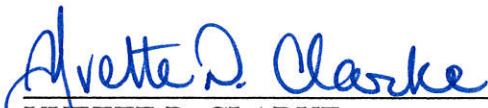
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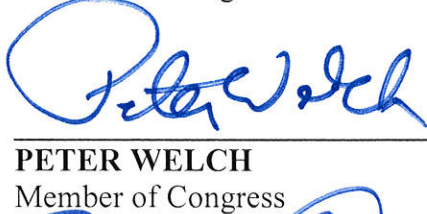
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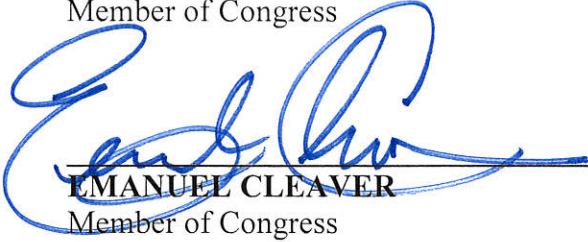
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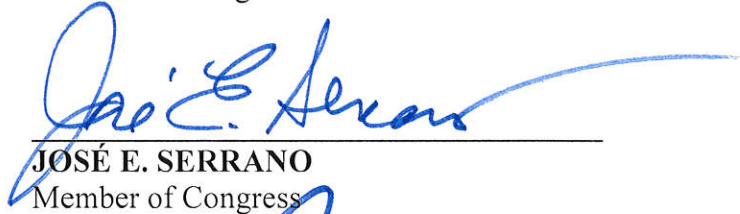

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