

December 5, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol S-221
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S House of Representatives
The Capitol H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S House of Representatives
The Capitol H-204
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Leader Pelosi:

We write to you as members of the BlueGreen Alliance, a coalition of the nation's largest labor unions and environmental organizations, collectively representing millions of members and supporters, and as organizations representing communities and workers on the frontlines of the crises in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, Florida, and elsewhere on the Gulf Coast. We urge you to support emergency supplemental legislation that is robust, funds recovery and rebuilding efforts in a way that results in stronger and more resilient communities, and is driven by and centered on the needs of those impacted. Congress must further ensure that cuts to critical domestic programs and agencies—ones that protect communities and workers and drive innovation—are not used to pay for this package.

Communities continue to face the impacts of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Nate. These impacts include immediate public health threats like those to Puerto Rico's already weak drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, currently threatening the safety of millions of Americans. These storms severely damaged electricity transmission and distribution systems in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, causing massive blackouts with millions of residents and many businesses losing power. While power has been restored to most residents and businesses in Texas and Florida (with about 5,000 residents still without power in each state), in Puerto Rico over 1 million residents still have not had their power restored, and the numbers are even worse in the Virgin Islands.

Congress must act swiftly to provide the resources needed for a strong and just recovery. It is essential that resources be provided at a level sufficient to meet the recovery needs on the ground and in line with what communities are requesting. The amount of funding requested by the Trump administration is woefully inadequate.

Furthermore, the ill-considered offsets proposed by the administration for this package would directly hurt America's working families, small businesses, communities, and environment. They include: cuts to programs that directly promote education, economic development, manufacturing investment, and job growth nationwide and in America's industrial and rural communities; cuts that punish government cost cutting by pulling funds from critical future year operations; and the extension of damaging, wide-scale cuts to non-defense spending that ultimately take money out of the pockets of poor and middle class families and create an overall drag on the economy. The administration also proposes to cut programs that help spur American

manufacturing, innovation, expansion, and job growth and retention—like the Advanced Technology Vehicles Manufacturing loan program. These cuts would cause further harm to communities across the country. Congressional leadership must not hold this urgently needed relief funding hostage to these damaging and counter-productive offset proposals.

This package must address the immediate needs of communities and ensure that they can re-build in a way that allows them to become more resilient, stronger, and more sustainable. Strategic investment in infrastructure and a well-trained workforce can ensure that communities are prepared for the impacts of extreme weather and the challenges of the next century. Investing in infrastructure for conditions that used to exist in the past will only leave communities even more vulnerable to risks. Instead, it is essential for projected conditions to be considered in the decision making process for future infrastructure developments.

In particular, the recovery process provides an opportunity to build a cleaner, more resilient, and cost-effective electricity system in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that is less vulnerable to extreme weather. Investing in advanced grid technologies and clean, distributed generation like solar with battery storage, and other low-carbon technologies could help reduce future outages in Puerto Rico, while providing power for critical facilities and vulnerable populations following extreme weather events. Ultimately, the federal government should support Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the rebuilding and modernization of the electricity grid, with maximum local governance and control, without turning public assets over to private interests.

This package must also ensure that our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have adequate healthcare access and coverage. The federal government must provide appropriate Medicaid funding and flexibility to both the U.S. territories and states receiving individuals displaced by these hurricanes. Providing appropriate care includes temporarily increasing the federal Medicaid matching rate for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to 100 percent and ensuring that evacuees can receive Medicaid services in the states where they were forced to relocate.

Lastly, this package must maintain a commitment to long-standing labor, procurement, and environmental standards. Any legislation should follow processes that ensure effective environmental review and public participation in infrastructure decisions, while also prioritizing the resources needed to ensure these projects move forward quickly and deliver benefits to communities and workers quickly. It must further maximize the return to taxpayers and the American economy by ensuring that projects built using public resources are subject to “Buy America” requirements. Additionally, Davis-Bacon provisions that ensure workers are paid prevailing wages on public works projects must also be enforced. Ensuring U.S. maritime labor and environmental regulations are sustained also requires maintaining the Jones Act with possible temporary suspensions based on emergency need. Re-building should also utilize project labor agreements, community benefits agreements, and public interest procurement provisions and practices, such as those that prioritize improving training, working conditions, and community benefits, and those that prioritize use of the most efficient, cleanest materials and products with the lowest carbon and toxicity footprints. These measures help ensure that public investments deliver to workers and communities.

As these communities recover and build out the next generation of infrastructure, it is critical that they receive adequate funds immediately and are empowered to design for the future that they want and expect.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC)

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

National Wildlife Federation (NWF)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Sierra Club

International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART)

Union of Concerned Scientists

United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA)

United Steelworkers (USW)

Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)

CC: Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey