United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 25, 2017

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

We write to express our deep concerns over the crisis unfolding in Puerto Rico since Hurricanes Maria and Irma, and to request that your Administration increase federal support for the residents there. Specifically, we write to share our concern that two smaller Puerto Rican islands, Vieques and Culebra, are not receiving the supplies or federal personnel support they urgently need. Your attention to the necessities of the U.S. citizens on the islands would provide critical assistance during a time of crisis.

In addition to the financial support you are seeking for Puerto Rico, we urge you to deploy immediate assistance to the islands' residents, including clean drinking water and food supplies. The Federal Government's assets, both military and civilian, can help mitigate the challenges that Vieques and Culebra are encountering due to their remote locations.

An area of particular public health concern is the 24 Superfund sites located in Puerto Rico. One of those sites, the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area, is located in Vieques. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which administers the Superfund Program, recently advised residents to abstain from drinking water from Superfund sites. However, Vieques is isolated, communication has generally been limited since the hurricanes, and the shortage of water was reported to be especially acute on the island. Therefore, we are unable to guarantee residents there will heed EPA's guidance and avoid the potential adverse health effects associated with drinking contaminated water unless there is sufficient Federal Government presence on the island to provide access to clean drinking water. There previously have been concerns about Vieques fishers and residents obtaining contaminated food from the area, and these concerns should be heightened at this time.[1] Furthermore, should any of the island's unexploded bombs and bullets wash into the sea, rivers, or streams, it will likely cause major contamination and other safety hazards. In the wake of Hurricane Maria, the EPA temporarily shut down response operations,[2] and a robust EPA presence is now needed more than ever. **We urge you to make monitoring and securing the Vieques site a priority for the duration of recovery.**

Contamination of drinking water and food are but two of several public health concerns associated with Superfund sites. For years, residents have warned that contamination associated with Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area has been linked to heightened cancer rates among the 9,000 people who live there, which are higher than those in any other Puerto Rican

[1] https://science.house.gov/sites/republicans.science.house.gov/files/documents/hearings/052010_Wargo.pdf
[2] http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/puerto-rico-proves-too-hazardous-for-epa/article/2635377

municipality.[3] Today, Vieques is burdened with some of the highest sickness rates in the Caribbean and the residents there are eight times more likely to die of cardiovascular disease and seven times more likely to die of diabetes than others in Puerto Rico. The federal response on Vieques and Culebra should also include a robust presence of medical staff to address these residents' health issues.

The challenges we face in Puerto Rico are tremendous, and the challenges facing Vieques and Culebra were imposing even before the hurricanes. The first step to doing right by these U.S. citizens is to ensure they have the help they need on the ground in this time of need. We urge you to prioritize additional federal personnel and increase supply distribution for Vieques and Culebra without delay.

Sincerely,

TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senator

ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator

KAMALA D. HARRIS
United States Senator

RON WYDEN
United States Senator

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator

[3] https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/vieques-invisible-health-crisis/498428/