

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

September 23, 2022

The Honorable Joseph Biden  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We appreciate your rapid response to Hurricane Fiona, which has displaced families and damaged critical infrastructure in Puerto Rico. Your disaster declaration<sup>1</sup> will make federal assistance available to the Island to help families and local governments recover. While Individual Assistance (IA) has been approved for many municipalities on the Island, we write to voice our support for the immediate approval of IA for the remaining municipalities in accordance with Governor Pierluisi's initial request that IA be authorized for the entire Island.<sup>2</sup>

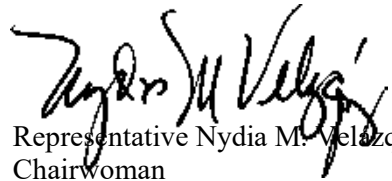
As of today, hard hit municipalities, such as Loíza, Cabo Rojo, Guánica, and Lajas—home to some of the lowest income households on the Island—have not yet been approved for IA. This assistance, among other things, allows households to apply for financial and direct assistance to cover housing and any other necessary expense that is underinsured or uninsured.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, federal and local governments have struggled to ensure a just and equitable recovery following major disasters.<sup>4</sup> However, given your administration's commitment to advancing equity and racial justice,<sup>5</sup> it is our hope that we can work together to avoid repeating similar mistakes of the past. While we understand that it is not uncommon for new assistance designations to be made on a rolling basis,<sup>6</sup> we also know that the entire Island of Puerto Rico has been affected by this disaster.<sup>7</sup> We look forward to working together to equitably address the recovery needs of communities across the Island.

Sincerely,



Representative Maxine Waters  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Financial Services  
U.S. House of Representatives



Representative Nydia M. Velázquez  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Small Business  
U.S. House of Representatives

cc: The Honorable Patrick McHenry, Ranking Member, Committee on Financial Services  
The Honorable Blaine Luetkemeyer, Ranking Member, Committee on Small Business  
The Honorable Deanne Criswell, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

<sup>1</sup> White House, [President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Approves Puerto Rico Disaster Declaration](#) (Sep. 21, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> FEMA, [Daily Operations Briefing](#) (Sep. 21, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Research Service, [A Brief Overview of FEMA's Individual Assistance Program](#) (Feb. 16, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Zach Despart, [Texas said inland counties had lower disaster risk, yet awarded them huge share of \\$1B in Harvey aid](#) (June 18, 2021); NBC News, [New probe confirms Trump officials blocked Puerto Rico from receiving hurricane aid](#) (Apr. 22, 2021); NAACP-LDF, [Civil Rights Organizations Settle Hurricane Katrina Housing Discrimination Case Against HUD And Louisiana](#) (Jul. 6, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> White House, [Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (Jan. 20, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> [44 CFR § 206.40](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian, [Flooding and landslides in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Fiona knocks out power to island](#) (Sep. 19, 2022).