

September 28, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to immediately deploy all available federal assets and relevant federal agencies to Puerto Rico for the express purpose of reestablishing telecommunications services such as telephone, cellular phone, and internet services in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The situation is very dire in Puerto Rico right now and with many localities still cut off from the rest of the island, communications are key in sharing information, residents receiving aid from first responders as well as from their relatives in the 50 states, and localities being able to respond to the first aid needs of communities and receive the support necessary to prevent further loss of life.

Currently, private telecommunications service providers are sending response teams from the 50 states and assessing the damage to the infrastructure in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. While the service providers have been proactive, we believe that due to the gravity of the situation, it is necessary for the federal government to support the reestablishment of services as quickly as possible for individuals and localities throughout the islands. In short, cellular and internet connections for basic communications purposes are crucial in fulfilling basic necessities. FEMA and other government agencies such as the Office of Cybersecurity and Communications at the Department of Homeland Security's National Protection and Programs Directorate have the mission of helping restore emergency communications networks and critical infrastructure for government, first responders, states, and localities. In addition, the Department of Defense has the capacity to provide resources and capabilities when other federal agencies are overwhelmed. We respectfully request that the full extent of these federal assets be deployed immediately to help restore individual service as well- at least until private service providers can fully restore their networks.

The lack of communications is undermining the relief effort- especially in communities currently cut off from other parts of the island. A working cellular network is necessary in order to receive emergency services and medically treat those in need to prevent the loss of life. It is also vital in order for municipalities to communicate with Commonwealth and federal disaster response authorities in order to receive the necessary help. From roads that need to be cleared, to locating missing persons, to communicating with remote areas and maintaining the safety and security of its residents, telecommunications services are vital.

Network restoration will also assist disaster response relief teams in narrowly tailoring aid to those areas most in need and quickly deploying assets across the island. In short, reestablishing communications in a prompt manner is crucial in order to have an effective disaster response and relief efforts.

The people of Puerto Rico need robust assistance at this hour of great need and it is incumbent upon us to help in every manner possible. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress

cc:

Acting Secretary Elaine Duke,
Department of Homeland Security

Administrator William B. "Brock" Long,
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)