

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

October 17, 2017

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20535-0001

Dear Director Wray:

On October 12, 2017, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) San Juan Field Office announced that “[t]he FBI has received numerous complaints of mishandling and misappropriation of emergency supplies provided by the federal government for the people of Puerto Rico, by local government officials.”¹ Specifically, the FBI is investigating the misappropriation of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) supplies in at least six of Puerto Rico’s 78 municipalities.²

According to an FBI Special Agent in San Juan, the complaints include allegations that, “mayors of local municipalities, or people associated with their offices, are giving their political supporters special treatment, goods they’re not giving to other people who need them.”³ One allegation accuses a party official driving off in his personal vehicle full of FEMA supplies obtained from a government building.⁴ The Office of the United States Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico is also investigating these complaints.⁵

The Committee is very troubled by these allegations. Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico as the island’s most devastating storm since 1928, and is estimated to have caused \$45 to \$95 billion in damage to the territory.⁶ In addition to the heart-rending loss of life, almost a month later, 85 percent of residents still do not have electricity and 40 percent do not have access to

¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation San Juan Field Office, U.S. Dep’t of Justice, FBI Seeking Public Assistance About Misappropriation of Emergency Funds, (Oct. 12, 2017), available at <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/sanjuan/news/press-releases/fbi-seeking-public-assistance-about-misappropriation-of-emergency-funds>.

² Jake Gibson, *FBI in Puerto Rico investigating if corrupt local officials are ‘withholding’ or ‘mishandling’ crucial supplies*, FOX NEWS, Oct. 13, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/10/12/fbi-in-puerto-rico-investigating-if-corrupt-local-officials-are-withholding-or-mishandling-crucial-supplies.html>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Jill Disis, *Hurricane Maria could be a \$95 billion storm for Puerto Rico*, CNN, Sept. 28, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/28/news/economy/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-damage-estimate/index.html>.

running water.⁷ The Federal Communications Commission reports that approximately 74 percent of the island's cellular sites are inoperable.⁸ It is estimated that it will take months for these vital services to be restored to the island.⁹ Meanwhile, approximately 350,000 Puerto Rican residents have registered with FEMA to receive financial assistance.¹⁰

Prior to Hurricane Maria's landfall, FEMA along with the Department of Defense pre-positioned emergency response assets and supplies for quick activation.¹¹ Thousands of emergency relief workers are deployed in Puerto Rico.¹² To date, FEMA, in conjunction with other federal agencies, has provided more than 8 million meals and 6 million liters of water with millions more liters of water and meals expected to be distributed in the coming weeks.¹³

With so many residents still in grave need of basic supplies, it is essential that assistance from the federal government is provided in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The public's confidence in the integrity of FEMA's distribution of emergency supplies is also imperative. Allegations that local elected officials are distributing life-sustaining FEMA emergency supplies based on political loyalty is deeply disturbing. Any persons misappropriating FEMA emergency supplies should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Per House Rule X, the Committee on Natural Resources is the principal committee of jurisdiction for insular areas of the United States. Therefore, to assist the Committee's oversight of the recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, please provide a briefing to the Committee as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 23, 2017.

Please contact John Strom and Sang Yi of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-7107 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

⁷ *Puerto Rico Still in the Dark Three Weeks After Hurricane Maria Devastated the Island*, LA TIMES, (last accessed Oct. 16, 2017), available at <http://www.latimes.com/visuals/framework/la-na-puerto-rico-unfurled-timeline-20171013-htmlstory.html>.

⁸ Federal Communications Commission, Communications Status Report for Areas Impacted by Hurricane Maria Oct. 15, 2017, available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/hurricane-maria-communications-status-report-oct-15>.

⁹ *Supra* note 7.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Army Sgt. Juanita Philip and Sgt. 1st Class Jessica Barnett, *National Guard Plans Relief Efforts as Hurricane Maria Slams Puerto Rico*, U.S. Dep't of Defense, Sept. 20, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1318026/national-guard-plans-relief-efforts-as-hurricane-maria-slams-puerto-rico/>.

¹² U.S. Dep't of Homeland Security, Federal Government Continues Hurricane Maria Response and Relief Operations, (Sept. 25, 2017), available at <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/09/25/federal-government-continues-hurricane-maria-response-and-relief-operations>.

¹³ FEMA, U.S. Dep't of Homeland Security, Overview of Federal Efforts to Prepare for and Respond to Hurricane Maria, (last accessed Oct. 26, 2017), available at <https://www.fema.gov/blog/2017-09-29/overview-federal-efforts-prepare-and-respond-hurricane-maria>; See also FEMA, U.S. Dep't of Homeland Security, Meals and Water Top List of Unified Efforts Towards Recovery in Puerto Rico, (Oct. 15, 2017), available at <https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2017/10/15/4339/meals-and-water-top-list-unified-efforts-toward-recovery-puerto-rico>.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Subcommittee on
Oversight and Investigations



Doug LaMalfa
Chairman
Subcommittee on Indian,
Insular and Alaska Native Affairs



Jenniffer González- Colón
Vice-Chair
Subcommittee on Indian,
Insular and Alaska Native Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Hon. Raúl M. Grijalva, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
The Hon. A. Donald McEachin, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
The Hon. Norma Torres, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs