

Durbin, Duckworth, colleagues to Trump: We must do more for Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Bill Nelson (D-FL), Chuck Schumer (D-NY), and 35 additional colleagues in a letter to President Trump to express deep concern about the situation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.



In the letter, the senators wrote, “We write to express deep concern about the dire humanitarian situation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In Puerto Rico, Hurricane Maria recently knocked out the entire island’s electric grid leaving at least 3.4 million Americans with no power, decimated countless structures, and claimed the lives of at least 16 individuals. Hospitals have no running water or basic supplies, and 95% of cellphone structures are still inactive. As a result, we still do not have an accurate assessment of the destruction.”

“In the words of Governor Ricardo Rosselló, the people of Puerto Rico have been ‘essentially devastated.’ The United States Virgin Islands has also suffered catastrophic damage. While they slowly begin their recovery, more help is needed.”

“At a time when there is not a second to lose and the health and well-being of millions of Americans in the U.S. territories depend on swift action, we have identified several areas where strong and decisive leadership is needed,” the letter continues.

The letter calls for eight specific actions to be undertaken by the Trump administration:

1. Calls on President Trump to issue a full Disaster Declaration for the entire island of Puerto Rico, which has yet to happen.
2. Calls on President Trump to appoint a Special Assistant for Rebuilding, to coordinate the multi-faceted federal efforts for Puerto Rico across all departments and agencies.
3. Calls on President Trump to request more funding to assist Puerto Rico’s Medicaid program.
4. Calls on President Trump to utilize all federal resources to restore power, including sending Department of Energy experts; 500 utility employees; 100 fuel trucks; and 200 generators.
5. Calls on President Trump to send more Department of Defense assets: construction battalions to repair power and transportation infrastructure, command and control aircraft for air traffic control; helicopters for search and rescue; and 1,500 service members to provide disaster and humanitarian assistance.
6. Calls on President Trump to work with Congress to waive the local cost share requirement for FEMA public assistance disaster funding for all categories of FEMA public assistance.
7. Calls on President Trump to send assets and expertise from across the federal government to restore communications, including from Department of Commerce, FCC, Coast Guard, and DOD.
8. Calls on President Trump to ensure that FEMA, Coast Guard, and DOD work together effectively to restore all ports to working condition.

Earlier this week, Durbin and Duckworth [wrote](#) to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Speaker of the House of Representatives Paul Ryan, along with nine of their colleagues, requesting immediate action on disaster relief legislation for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Illinois Air National Guard has deployed a team to provide telecommunication assistance, food, water, tents, and cots to Puerto Rico. Illinois has the seventh largest population of Puerto Ricans in the United States, with more than 200,000 residents of Puerto Rican heritage.

In addition to Durbin, Duckworth, Cantwell, Nelson, and Schumer, the letter to President Trump was also signed by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Tom Carper (D-DE), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Chris Coons (D-DE), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Gary Peters (D-MI), Rob Wyden (D-OR), Bob Casey (D-PA), Angus King (I-ME), Patty Murray (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Al Franken (D-MN), Kamala Harris (D-CA), and Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

The full letter can be found [here](#).