

# News from Congresswoman NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ

Representing New York's 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District • Brooklyn, Manhattan & Queens  
Ranking Member, House Small Business Committee



For Immediate Release  
September 27, 2017

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## **House Members Demand Trump Provide Better Maria Response**

### *145 Lawmakers Call on Department of Defense to Deploy Life-Saving Resources*

Washington, D.C. — Today, Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY) led 145 Members of Congress in writing to President Trump, demanding that the Department of Defense deploy additional resources to aid recovery efforts in Puerto Rico. Lawmakers are calling for the appointment of a senior general to oversee all recovery efforts, the deployment of the *USS Abraham Lincoln* aircraft carrier and to increase personnel to assist local law enforcement.

“3.5 million American citizens in Puerto Rico are facing a dire humanitarian crisis,” said Velázquez. “I have heard from seniors whose medical needs are not being met due to power outages, children who are suffering from extreme heat in the crowded airport and families who are still unable to contact their loved ones. These are matters of life and death.”

“While the situation on the ground remains desperate, President Trump held a press conference yesterday congratulating his Administration on their response,” Velázquez added. “If President Trump doesn’t swiftly deploy every available resource that our country has, then he has failed the people of Puerto Rico - and this will become his Katrina. Every second in this effort counts and the stakes are too high for further delay, inaction or inefficiency.”

The full text of the letter is below and online here with a list of signatories.

[For a PDF, click here.](#)

September 27, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

On September 20th, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands endured a direct impact from Hurricane Maria. With winds up to 160 mph, Hurricane Maria devastated these islands, caused significant power outages, destroyed telecommunications infrastructure, and thereby paralyzed the region. Given the impact of the damage and the population of 3.6 million American citizens affected, we are concerned that federal

efforts to date have been insufficient to address the severity of the situation. We know there are DOD elements helping today, and all the service members involved are working very hard, but we are concerned that the scale of DOD assets supporting the operation are inadequate. Thus, we write to urge you to further mobilize the Department of Defense to immediately deploy additional assets in support of Puerto Rican and U.S. Virgin Island recovery efforts.

As you know, the Department of Defense has additional capabilities that could help alleviate suffering in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and prevent this catastrophe from worsening. First and foremost, a senior general officer must be appointed to work with FEMA to manage a joint response assist with the recovery effort on the ground, and enable local constituencies to have a single point of contact. This was done in response to Hurricane Katrina, and we feel the same approach is warranted now for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

As we are sure you are aware, in both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, there are numerous municipalities that are inaccessible from the ground, which is where DOD engineer and aviation assets would be most helpful. With millions of U.S. citizens stranded in remote areas without basic necessities, engineers are needed first to clear the roads. Additional aviation assets are needed to get relief supplies to isolated locations. Additionally, substantial ground and air logistics support is required to get aid to the islands, rescue stranded citizens, and provide them with supplies and thereafter assist with the restoration of power and telecommunications infrastructure if needed. To fulfill DOD's mission, we believe the aircraft carrier, USS Abraham Lincoln, should be sent to the region, similar to its deployment to Miami following Hurricane Irma.

DHS has indicated it has "provided more than 1.5 million meals, 1.1 million liters of water, nearly 300 infant and toddler kits, and nearly 12,000 emergency roofing kits to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria's landfall." While these meals and resources are profoundly needed, unfortunately, there is a large portion of the population that has been underserved.

Lastly, DOD has critical resources that could assist with addressing security issues. We have heard reports that the ongoing supply shortages are causing looting and crime. We were recently informed of armed gangs ransacking a warehouse that distributes food and supplies. Defense Department personnel could provide essential support to local law enforcement in both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to ensure relief supplies are delivered to those most in need- and that those that have already been immensely devastated by the hurricane, do not need to fear for their lives when filling up their gas at the pump or securing food for their family.

We thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Nydia M. Velazquez

Smith

Hoyer  
Crowley  
Lawson  
Nadler  
Holmes Norton  
Wasserman Schultz  
Meeks  
Linda Sanchez  
Higgins  
Sires  
Evans  
Raskin  
Napolitano  
Meng  
Roybal-Allard  
Castro  
Capuano  
Dingell  
Quigley  
Larson  
Thompson  
Watson Coleman  
Carolyn Maloney  
Frederica Wilson  
DeGette  
Deutch  
Kildee  
Carbajal  
Matsui  
Langevin  
Takano  
Price  
McCollum  
Welch  
Doyle  
Adams  
Crist  
Tsongas  
Engel  
Veasey  
Hanabusa  
Schakowsky  
Cohen  
Blumenauer  
Connolly  
Sablan

Murphy  
Lowey  
Slaughter  
McGovern  
DeLauro  
Torres  
Pallone  
Castor  
Gomez  
Tonko  
Norcross  
Correa  
Sean Patrick Maloney  
Polis  
Serrano  
Costa  
Lujan  
Cleaver  
Shea-Porter  
Blunt Rochester  
Robert Brady  
Barragan  
Chu  
Castor  
Beyer  
Jackson Lee  
Lee  
Demings  
Yarmuth  
Boyle  
Neal  
Lowenthal  
Beatty  
O'Halleran  
Gutiérrez  
Moulton  
Espaillat  
Bonamici  
Himes  
Ryan  
Cicilline  
Kaptur  
Kilmer  
Rice  
Lipinski  
Schneider

Soto  
Suozzi  
Ellison  
Courtney  
Speier  
Cárdenas  
Keating  
Pascrell, Jr.  
Clarke  
Waltz  
Heck  
Lowey  
Gabbard  
Titus  
Lujan Grisham  
Clay  
Carson  
DeSaulnier  
McEachin  
Foster  
Al Green  
Plaskett  
Schiff  
Payne, Jr.  
Sarbanes  
Pingree  
Lawrence  
Lynch  
Lieu  
Kennedy  
Scott Peters  
Jefferies  
Grijalva  
Delaney  
Bustos  
David Scott  
Brownley  
Gene Green  
Bass  
Cummings  
Doggett  
Khanna  
Calderon  
Eshoo  
Vargas  
Susan Davis

Aguilar  
Bobby scott  
Panetta  
Visclosky  
Gallego  
Bera

Cc: The Honorable James Mattis, Secretary of Defense