

COALITION FOR FOOD SECURITY ✦ PUERTO RICO

September 26, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United State Senate Majority Leader
US Capitol Building, S-221
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United State Senate Republican Leader
US Capitol Building, S-230
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Republican Leader McConnell, Chair Leahy, and Ranking Member Shelby,

On September 19, 2022, Hurricane Fiona caused catastrophic damage to Puerto Rico striking the entire island. Currently, the citizens of Puerto Rico suffered massive flooding, loss of homes and property, road and bridge collapses, and the loss of electricity and access to water is widespread. Once again, children, families, and individuals are being devastated by hunger and food insecurity and require urgent support from Congress for emergency disaster funding for nutrition aid.

This tragedy follows over five years of recovery in Puerto Rico due to the severe damage inflicted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Unlike the States and territories operating under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Puerto Rico does not have access to disaster SNAP or the legislative authority to operate a disaster nutrition assistance program in times of disaster. As this juncture, Puerto Rico's government officials and non-profit leaders do not know whether Puerto Rico will receive funding, how much funding it will receive, or what requirements will be enacted.

Under the Stafford Act, Federal agencies are required to alleviate the suffering and damage that result from disasters by encouraging the development of comprehensive disaster preparedness and assistance plans, programs, capabilities, and organizations by the States and by local governments. A 2019 report by the USDA Office of the Inspector General noted that, following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Virgin Islands operated D-SNAP in November 2017, six weeks following Hurricane Maria. In the case of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Disaster Relief Act provided Puerto Rico a grant totaling \$1.27 billion to fund disaster nutrition assistance *which became available six months later in March 2018*, exacerbating the hunger and food insecurity crisis on the island.

We are deeply concerned that Puerto Rico will experience similar detrimental delays for disaster nutrition aid following Hurricane Fiona. Families affected by Hurricane Fiona cannot wait months for additional nutrition aid and it is critical for Congress to authorize an emergency appropriation in the amount of \$1 billion to help feed families and individuals in Puerto Rico.

As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans residing on the island deserve urgent and equitable inclusion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and access to additional nutrition aid in times of crisis and natural catastrophe. We look forward to your favorable response to this urgent request.

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Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico

Able Sales
ACOMERPR
Alianza for Progress
Alliance to End Hunger
American Federation for Teachers (AFT)
Asociacion de Comercio al Detal, Inc. (Puerto Rico Retailers Association)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
B. Fernandez
Banco de Alimentos de Puerto Rico
Bread for the World
CC1 Companies
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Law and Social Policy
Coalition on Human Needs
Coca-Cola Puerto Rico Bottlers
Feeding America
Florida Immigration Coalition
Food Research & Action Center
Grupo Navis
Hispanic Federation
Holsum de Puerto Rico, Inc.
Instituto Del Desarrollo para la Juventud
Kikuet Foods
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Mendez & Co.
Miranda Family Fund
National Disability Rights Network
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Organization for Women (NOW)
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
Oscar Cash and Carry
PFLAG National
Plaza Provision
Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce
Puerto Rico Farm Bureau
Quirch Foods Corporation
RESULTS
Share Our Strength
SOJOURNERS
SuperMax
Supermercados ECONO
The Florida Immigrant Coalition
The Kraft Heinz Company
TOTE Maritime
Unidos US
Walmart Puerto Rico
ZERO To THREE