

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 1, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Cochran, and Ranking Member Leahy:

On October 5, 2017, we, alongside 28 other Members of Congress from both parties, sent a letter to the House Appropriations Committee, copied to OMB, requesting that the third emergency supplemental appropriations act include funding to assist local educational agencies and institutions of higher education that enroll students displaced by Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey, so that these schools can properly educate both new and existing students.

On November 17, OMB requested that Congress enact a third supplemental totaling \$44 billion, including \$1.235 billion for the “Hurricane Education Recovery” account. According to OMB, this account would be used to “provide funding to school districts and post-secondary institutions receiving displaced students” and to “support restart activities” in damaged K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions where such restart activities are not funded through FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund. OMB did not provide a recommendation regarding how funding in the Hurricane Education Recovery account should be broken out, leaving those details to Congress.

Although we believe the \$1.235 billion request is a good start,¹ we write to respectfully request that this figure be reasonably increased and that the appropriations language be crafted so as to

¹ To clarify, this funding request is only a “good start” if it is not intended to encompass substantial activities to repair damaged or destroyed schools and universities in Puerto Rico. That effort will likely require far more funding, perhaps provided as part of a fourth supplemental appropriations bill—as envisioned by OMB—that is focused principally on recovery in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Puerto Rico

ensure that a substantial percentage of the funding will be swiftly allocated to school districts and post-secondary institutions that enroll displaced students. These school districts and institutions of higher education could not have anticipated—and therefore could not have planned and budgeted for—a contingency of this magnitude.

Since Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico on September 2017, hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico have already left the U.S. territory for states in the mainland. Some will return to Puerto Rico, but many will not. According to the Governor of Florida, between October 3 and November 29, more than 199,000 individuals from Puerto Rico arrived at airports and seaports in Florida.

As of November 21, county-based school districts in Florida had enrolled 7,212 displaced students from Puerto Rico and 710 displaced students from the U.S. Virgin Islands. As of November 27, public schools in Orange County have enrolled nearly 2,800 displaced students in total and over 2,100 from Puerto Rico alone. Reports from various local educational agencies and state educational agencies, the Council of the Great City Schools, and media outlets indicate that Florida is not alone in receiving displaced students, with large numbers of dislocated students enrolling in schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas, among others.²

Over the coming months, the flow of students from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to the mainland is expected to continue more or less unabated. Many of the students from Puerto Rico will be English-language learners, given that Spanish is the primary language of instruction in Puerto Rico's public schools. As a general matter, more resources will be required to educate these students.

To place the \$1.235 billion OMB request in context, it is useful to compare it to the education-related funding that Congress appropriated in the wake of the Gulf Coast hurricanes in 2005 through the enactment of three laws, namely P.L. 109-148 (December 2005), P.L. 109-234 (June 2006), and P.L. 110-28 (May 2007). Congress appropriated a total of \$1.945 billion for education,

Governor has requested \$93.9 billion in emergency appropriations, including \$8.4 billion for “education and schools.” The request notes that “several thousand schools” in Puerto Rico were damaged and 598 public schools have yet to reopen. (This is far more than the 700 schools that were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. See Section 101 of P.L. 109-148).

² See, e.g., *Washington Post*, “After Maria, US schools get influx of Puerto Rican students” (Nov. 15, 2017); *NPR*, “Puerto Rican Students Head To The Mainland]For School” (Oct. 14, 2017); *Education Week*, “School Districts Ready to Enroll Puerto Rican Students Affected By Hurricane Maria” (Sept. 28, 2017); *Fox 25 Boston*, “Influx of students from Puerto Rico after hurricane putting strain on system” (Nov. 22, 2017); *Hartford Courant*, “Connecticut Schools Prepare For Potential Influx Of Puerto Rican Students” (Sept. 28, 2017); *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “Puerto Ricans fleeing island picking Philly as home” (Nov. 10, 2017); see also *Florida Politics*, “Florida public school enrollment has jumped by 8,000 post-Maria” (Nov. 28, 2017).

consisting of \$1.665 billion for elementary and secondary education and \$280 million for higher education. Of the \$1.665 billion for elementary and secondary education, \$880 million was for local educational agencies and schools that enrolled displaced students, \$750 million was for aid to restart school operations, \$30 million was to recruit and retain staff at disaster-affected schools, and \$5 million was to assist local educational agencies that serve displaced youth who are homeless. Of the \$280 million for higher education, \$10 million was for institutions of higher education that enroll displaced students, \$190 million was for the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Mississippi Institutes of Higher Learning, and \$80 million was to help institutions of higher education, and students attending those institutions, who were directly affected by the disasters.

Informed by the fact that Congress appropriated \$1.945 billion in education-related funding after the Gulf Coast hurricanes, and given both the migration patterns seen to date and the likelihood that the situation in Puerto Rico will remain deeply challenging for the foreseeable future, Congress should reasonably increase education-related funding in the upcoming supplemental beyond the \$1.235 billion requested by OMB. According to one (probably conservative) estimate, from 2017 to 2019, over 470,000 Puerto Rico residents are expected to relocate to the states, with most moving to Florida.³ Many of these displaced families will have school-age children. Critically, most of those students will require English-language instruction, which was not a factor after the Gulf Coast hurricanes.

In addition, the physical damage to educational facilities caused by the 2017 hurricanes is likely to be of comparable magnitude to the damage caused by the Gulf Coast hurricanes—and far larger if damage to Puerto Rico schools is fully included in the equation.


We look forward to working with you to ensure that the level of education-related funding provided in the third supplemental is commensurate with established and projected needs, and that the appropriations language is drafted so that school districts and institutions of higher education enrolling displaced students are able to swiftly receive a substantial portion of this funding.

³ See “Estimates of Post-Hurricane Maria Exodus from Puerto Rico,” Center for Puerto Rican Studies (October 2017), available at https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-MARIA%20EXODUS_V3.pdf.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Tom Cole, Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Mick Mulvaney, Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Honorable Betsy DeVos, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education