

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 31, 2018

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on
Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on
Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Crapo and Ranking Member Brown:

We write to urge the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs to conduct an oversight hearing on the effects Hurricanes Irma and Maria have had on housing markets in Florida and Puerto Rico. Specifically, we request the hearing explore foreclosures in Puerto Rico and the impact that the March 31, 2018 expiration of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) forbearance on foreclosures will have on displaced homeowners. We encourage the Committee to evaluate the federal government's efficiency and effectiveness in providing short and long-term housing assistance to victims following the disasters, and address the deficiency of affordable housing in Florida.

According to recent reports, 35 percent of Puerto Ricans face foreclosure or delinquency, more than double the national rate of 14.4 percent during the peak of the housing crisis in 2010.¹ With the expiration of the forbearance on foreclosures set for March 31, 2018, defaults on mortgage payments are expected to rise to unprecedented numbers. Making matters worse, it has been reported that nearly 90 percent of homes on the island were completely destroyed as a result of Hurricane Maria and 80 to 90 percent of homes in the Florida Keys were destroyed or sustained damage as a result of Hurricane Irma.²³ As displaced families move to Florida or within Florida, our state faces its own set of challenges.

Insufficient affordable housing in Florida has permeated long-before the hurricanes, but was exacerbated by damages inflicted by Hurricane Irma and the influx of displaced families. To effectively evaluate post-disaster housing concerns, it is essential that the Committee explore affordable housing solutions for families who live in Florida and the families who will be forced to move to Florida.

¹ Matthew Goldstein, "The Next Crisis for Puerto Rico: A Crush of Foreclosures," *The New York Times*, Dec. 16, 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/business/puerto-rico-housing-foreclosures.html>

² Ryan Grenoble, "10 Numbers That Explain Hurricane Maria's Devastating Toll On Puerto Rico," *Huffington Post*, Sept. 22, 2017, available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/hurricane-maria-puerto-rico-by-numbers_us_59c541bde4b01cc57ff1fcb5

³ Associated Press, "Officials: 90 Percent of Homes In Florida Keys Damaged or Destroyed by Irma," *WCVB 5 ABC*, Sept. 12, 2017, available at: <http://www.wcvb.com/article/tropical-depression-irma-continues-across-the-us/12225634>

It is important to evaluate relief efforts and capabilities post-natural disasters. Such a hearing will provide the committee invaluable information to better prepare for future storms and devastation. On behalf of the millions of Floridians and Puerto Ricans affected by these hurricanes, we urge you to conduct a hearing to examine the impact they have had on access to housing in Florida and Puerto Rico, and identify any shortcomings in the response to the disasters.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Sincerely,



Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator