



# NEWS RELEASE

## For Immediate Release

October 17, 2017

**Contact:** Amanda Bosquez, [abosquez@naleo.org](mailto:abosquez@naleo.org)  
(202) 546-2536, (361) 548-6989 (cell)

Paula Valle Castanon, [pvalle@naleo.org](mailto:pvalle@naleo.org)  
(213) 747-7606 ext. 4414, (323) 253-6431 (cell)

## **NALEO Calls for Immediate Action to Address Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands**

*More than half of Puerto Rico and some of the U.S. Virgin Islands remains without electricity, with many still unable to communicate with loved ones and access clean water, fuel and food*

**Washington, D.C.** – The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) today issued a [letter](#) from President and Dallas County Treasurer Pauline Medrano to President Donald Trump and Members of Congress calling for immediate additional steps to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands following Hurricanes Maria and Irma.

These storms have had a devastating impact on the lives of millions of Americans. More than half of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands remain without electricity, and many still lack access to water, three weeks after the hurricanes hit. Thousands have not been able to communicate with loved ones, and are in desperate need of basic survival essentials, such as food, potable water, fuel and other supplies.

“The people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have demonstrated great ingenuity and strength, and will undoubtedly overcome this unprecedented tragedy, stated NALEO President and Dallas County Treasurer Pauline Medrano. “They cannot do it alone though, and need our leaders to act and provide the necessary supplies and tools for them to rebuild and recover.”

Although Congress and the Administration have taken some critical actions to begin addressing the crisis in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, more is needed given the magnitude of these catastrophes. In solidarity with our fellow U.S. citizens who are working to rebuild their neighborhoods and resume their livelihoods, NALEO President Medrano is urging President Donald Trump and Congress to take the following additional steps:

1. Appropriate additional immediate disaster relief funding earmarked for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands through standalone legislation. Puerto Rico’s 10-year economic recession, along with the negative impact of Hurricane Maria, have severely damaged the island’s infrastructure making transportation of supplies throughout the island difficult. Critical infrastructure has also been severely damaged in the U.S. Virgin Islands. A disaster relief funding package must be structured to help the territories recover basic functions as quickly as possible.
2. Extend the FEMA 60-day deadline for filing claims for disaster relief. Impassable roads, the extended loss of power and access to the internet and lack of telecommunications infrastructure continue to prevent people from assessing their property damage and making timely claims. Current estimates indicate it will be many months before Puerto Rico and the

U.S. Virgin Islands gain full access to electrical power, making the extension of this deadline essential.

3. Waive matching requirements for FEMA disaster public assistance programs beyond the previously-approved 180 days. Experts agree that it will take years for Island residents and localities to rebuild and recover after the devastation brought by recent hurricanes. Requiring communities to bear significant costs for recovery after only six months will redirect local resources from the most vulnerable and inflict severe stress on territorial governments whose tax bases have been dramatically disrupted.

4. Extend the Jones Act waiver for Puerto Rico for an additional period of time, based on consultation with local government officials. The people of Puerto Rico desperately need access to affordable food, medicine, clothing, and various basic supplies. The waiver will lower the cost of all imported goods needed for reconstruction and will ease the difficulty of delivering these materials to victims.

5. Delegate full logistical authority to Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan, the official currently in charge of military contributions to recovery efforts in Puerto Rico. To operate with expediency and efficiency, military personnel need direct authority to allocate and move logistics, communication and engineering assets to ensure those cut off from contact receive immediate assistance.

6. Orient disaster relief assistance and operations to improve the sustainability of territorial communities, and to respect and adhere to local direction. Even if it were possible, a mere return to the pre-hurricane landscape and conditions in U.S. Caribbean territories would only leave millions of Americans critically vulnerable to the next severe storm or other natural disaster. Relief programs must be designed thoughtfully to support durable development, and to invest decision-making authority in those best positioned to achieve this goal: the residents and governments of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

NALEO is a non-partisan membership organization made up of the more than 6,100 Latino elected officials serving in public office across the United States.

Over the past five years, NALEO Educational Fund has provided training for NALEO members on issues related to emergency preparedness, response and management, and maintained a strong partnership with the Red Cross. In the course of recent natural and manmade disasters, the organization has mobilized to support our members by providing timely information and resources to assist victims of these disasters, and by contributing to efforts to help their communities recover.

*To view NALEO President Pauline Medrano's letter to President Donald Trump and Members of Congress, click [here](#).*

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### **About NALEO**

*The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials is the non-partisan leadership organization of the nation's more than 6,100 Latino elected and appointed officials.*