



ORANGE COUNTY MAYOR
TERESA JACOBS

P.O. Box 1393, 201 SOUTH ROSALIND AVENUE, ORLANDO, FL 32802-1393
PHONE: 407-836-7370 • FAX: 407-836-7360 • Mayor@ocfl.net

October 6, 2017

The Honorable Rick Scott, Governor
State of Florida, The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott,

Thank you for your leadership in declaring a State of Emergency for all 67 counties in Florida in response to Hurricane Maria's catastrophic impact on Puerto Rico.

I know that you are doing everything within your authority as Governor to support those evacuees who are seeking emergency support and services. On behalf of our entire Orange County community, including our many beloved citizens and residents originally from Puerto Rico, we are grateful for your diligent efforts to obtain the appropriate support from FEMA – vital to successfully addressing this humanitarian crisis, and to providing the necessary resources to meet the needs of the displaced individuals and families.

As the potential scope of the needed assistance is beyond the resource capabilities of local governments, we support your actions, and remain in close communication with your Department of Emergency Management Director Wes Maul for direction and information.

As you know, Central Florida is the proud home to one of the largest Puerto Rican populations in the United States (198,008 in Orange County; 99,199 in Osceola County; and 47,511 in Seminole County). With the existing population of Puerto Rican families living in the region, coupled with the fact that, before Hurricane Maria, the Orlando International Airport (OIA) was scheduled to receive 12 flights from Puerto Rico a day, we will be a natural safe haven for many of the displaced individuals and families.

Considering the devastation to the San Juan Airport, OIA has not had comparable incoming flights; however, as the San Juan airport's infrastructure improves, I would expect those numbers to rebound and perhaps increase depending on the need.

Allow me to present a hypothetical situation. If families in just Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties were to invite family members from the Island to live with them for a period of time, we could easily expect over 300,000 evacuees, which represent less than 10 percent of the population of Puerto Rico. I would expect that within a month or so those individuals would seek alternate housing options.

Even if this hypothetical estimate is significantly overstated and we consider a lower rate of in-migration – say 1% of Puerto Rico's 3.1 million residents – we are still talking about 3,000 families and/or individuals without housing.

While this hypothetical situation is a simple one, it showcases the larger issues, particularly with regard to housing. As you know, Central Florida is already facing a critical housing shortage. Through the Regional Affordable Housing effort that I convened, and together with your Florida Affordable Housing Workgroup, we are working with a variety of partners to address this issue.

In light of the very real possibility of significant evacuees arriving in Florida, it is critical that we have a plan in place and be prepared for those who may need assistance. While the OIA Welcome Center is a great start in terms of centrally coordinating services from various state and local agencies and charitable organizations, there is not a moment to waste on the following priority issues:

- **FINANCIAL RESOURCES.** I was extremely pleased to hear that your proposal for Florida to be designated as a "host state" for evacuees has been approved by FEMA, and I commend you for pursuing such an innovative approach. This newly-created designation will allow Puerto Ricans to apply for FEMA Temporary Shelter Assistance and Individual Assistance funds – something they were not previously permitted to seek.
- **HOUSING RESOURCES.** As outlined earlier, this is an area of crucial need due to already scarce resources. From short-term needs to long-term impacts, please continue to convey my deep concern about this issue, and the well-documented insufficient supply of housing – especially rentals – in Central Florida.
- **MEDICAL RESOURCES.** From medication refills to medical assistance, there is an obvious need for continuity of care – particularly for those suffering from serious conditions, or vulnerable to illness.

Time is also of the essence with regard to the overall health, safety and welfare of our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico. Any number of scenarios – including another storm – could further threaten the public safety of citizens in Puerto Rico, as well as those in other U.S. island territories. Orange County and other counties across the state need to know FEMA's evacuation plan, should an evacuation become necessary so that we may identify land that is available on a semi-permanent basis which includes the necessary access to water, wastewater, utilities, etc.

As Orange County continues to recover from Hurricane Irma, our resources are severely limited. Therefore, we will properly look to the state and federal government to provide the plan and resources for temporary housing and other critical needs to help our displaced Puerto Rican brothers and sisters transition effectively to this next stage of life – and ultimately, to move forward as successful American citizens – not as permanent victims from Hurricane Maria.

Thank you for your continued leadership and perseverance.

Sincerely,



Teresa Jacobs

c: Wes Maul, Interim Director, Florida Division of Emergency Management
Don Fisher, Osceola County Manager
Nicole Guillet, Seminole County Manager
Orange County Congressional Delegation

**Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.*