



ORANGE COUNTY MAYOR

**TERESA JACOBS**

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November 1, 2017

Wesley Maul  
Interim Director  
Florida Division of Emergency Management  
2555 Shumard Oak Blvd  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Mr. Maul,

Please accept our appreciation for your dedication in serving as the Interim Director of Florida's Division of Emergency Management (DEM). To assist in your ongoing efforts, we have put together a short Central Florida update (Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties) for your review and use.

We are also requesting a meeting with DEM and FEMA to gain information as to the short and longer term plans to provide appropriate services and accommodations for evacuees from both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

As anticipated, we continue to see evacuees from Puerto Rico impacted by Hurricane Maria arriving in our tri-county region. Specifically, between October 2<sup>nd</sup> and October 24<sup>th</sup>, nearly 40,000 passengers from Puerto Rico arrived at Orlando International Airport (OIA); during that same time period, approximately 4,500 Puerto Rican citizens arrived at the Orlando Sanford International Airport – numbers that we expect to grow significantly in the coming weeks and months. In fact, as it currently stands, there are 785 flights scheduled to arrive at OIA by the end of the year, with 126,182 passengers expected.

As a reminder, Central Florida is the proud home to one of the largest Puerto Rican populations in the state of Florida, with approximately 198,008 individuals of Puerto Rican heritage in Orange County; 99,199 in Osceola County; and 47,511 in Seminole County. With such a strong Puerto Rican culture, our region is naturally a primary destination for Islanders seeking shelter from the ravages of Hurricane Maria.

In an effort to quickly access housing and critical services, under your leadership, two Welcome Centers were opened to provide services for emergent needs. At the Orlando International Airport Welcome Center, there are approximately 20 agencies and nonprofit organizations currently working to provide assistance, including the Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW). However, due to the highly concentrated Puerto Rican population in Osceola County – highest of any county in the state – Osceola County Government opened an assistance center themselves. Additionally, the Seminole County Office of Emergency Management and the Florida Department of Health have established a Welcome Center at the Orlando Sanford International Airport to assist evacuees.

With regard to housing evacuees, Orange County Government has contracted with HFUW to provide emergency services, *including short-term housing in hotel rooms*. Between October 2<sup>nd</sup> and October 24<sup>th</sup>, approximately 97 rooms have been rented by the HFUW for evacuees from Puerto Rico. This is a relatively low number considering the influx of evacuees, which is likely indicative of the fact that many evacuees are currently staying with friends or family. In Seminole County, most arriving passengers have also been met by friends or family. However, we believe the need for housing will increase – both as the number of people arriving without family connections grows, and as those temporarily living with friends or family seek longer term housing. This coupled with the fact that as we approach the holiday season – when our hotel occupancy will be at its peak – it is highly unlikely that we will be able to continue with this emergency housing assistance model.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is critical that local governments be apprised quickly of State and Federal response plans.

Despite our best efforts – and despite how deeply our community cares for our beloved Puerto Rican families and friends – we do not have a sufficient supply of housing to accommodate the anticipated influx of U.S. citizens. Further, because of the magnitude of this event and because it is a national, rather than local disaster, no single city, county or region has the resources or authority necessary to develop and implement a plan for ensuring that evacuees arriving in Florida or elsewhere on the mainland have access to appropriate housing, schools, medical care, transportation, and other necessary resources.

While several of the County's emergency management offices have been asked by DEM staff to identify a facility to serve as a congregate shelter, it is unclear whether this is intended to be the housing plan for the duration of the recovery efforts in Puerto Rico or just an interim measure while a more holistic approach is implemented.

In either case, as the lead agency with the funding, authority, and resources necessary to respond to the needs of those on the Island and those who have evacuated, it would be beneficial if FEMA would share their statewide plan for housing evacuees so that those of us at a local level who will likely be called on to help implement that plan can be prepared to assist. As of yesterday, FEMA and the Government of Puerto Rico announced that Transitional Sheltering Assistance is available to Puerto Ricans who have been displaced due to Hurricanes Irma and Maria. However, we still have outstanding concerns, as there are only 15 eligible hotels in our tri-county area.

As communities like ours wait for direction from FEMA and DEM regarding housing for evacuees – many of whom will likely be here for many months as power is restored and their homes are rebuilt – confusion and concern are mounting.

For instance, we have received calls from members of the state legislature making requests for shelters and offering ideas for housing. Local media is reporting that they have made numerous inquiries of the State DEM regarding housing plans for evacuees, yet they are not receiving a response. Emergency management staff and several of us personally have been asking for both the short and long term housing plan, to no avail. In the absence of a plan, there is the strong potential for chaos and United States citizens from Puerto Rico deserve better.

To that end and in an effort to eliminate further confusion, we request a meeting with FEMA and the State DEM to discuss housing and other concerns shared by the impacted jurisdictions in the Central Florida region and to learn of the Federal and State Governments' comprehensive plan for meeting the needs of evacuees.

We recognize this is a unique and challenging situation. Our hope is that through better communication we can assist DEM and FEMA. We stand ready to work with you and your team, and look forward to hearing from you soon.

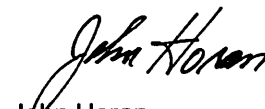
Sincerely,



Teresa Jacobs  
Mayor  
Orange County Government



Brandon Arrington  
Chairman  
Osceola County Commission



John Horan  
Chairman  
Seminole County Commission

c: The Honorable Rick Scott, State of Florida Governor  
Orange County State Legislative Delegation  
Orange County Congressional Delegation  
William B. Long, FEMA Administrator  
Don Fisher, Osceola County Manager  
Nicole Guillet, Seminole County Manager  
Ajit Lalchandani, Orange County Administrator