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September 22, 2008

R. David Paulison  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street S.W.  
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Paulison:

Since Saturday, Puerto Rico has been deluged by 24 to 30 inches of rain as a result of a storm system that is threatening to grow into a tropical depression. It is projected that another five inches of rain could fall by Monday evening. The entire Island is under flood watch and at least 18 flash flood warnings have been issued to date. Thousands of families in Puerto Rico are without power or water. Scores of roads have been closed due to flooding and landslides. At least four residents have already died in incidents caused by the storm.

The Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. §5721 et seq.) authorizes the President, at the request of the governor of the affected state, to issue an "emergency" or "major disaster" declaration in the event of a major storm. An emergency declaration triggers federal aid to protect property and citizen safety, with the goal of preventing the storm from becoming a catastrophic event. A major disaster declaration constitutes broader authority for federal agencies to provide supplemental assistance to help the state and local government, individuals, and certain nonprofit organizations recover from the storm.

A request for a major disaster or emergency declaration must be based on a finding by the governor that the situation "is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and the affected local governments and that federal assistance is necessary." In the event that a request for a major disaster or emergency declaration is made by the Governor of Puerto Rico, and in the event the President issues that declaration, I look forward to working with FEMA to ensure that essential aid reaches the individuals and communities that need it most.

Sincerely,

Luis G. Fortuño  
Member of Congress

cc: Stephen Kempf, Jr., Regional Administrator, Region 2  
Alejandro De La Campa, Director, Caribbean Area Office