United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

November 14, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray,

As Congress crafts a supplemental appropriations package to help areas affected by recent disasters, including Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey, we ask you to consider the needs of local educational agencies (LEAs), Head Start agencies and early childhood education programs, in addition to colleges and universities. As many students are forced out of their schools as a result of these disasters, it is critical to think about the areas both directly affected by the natural disasters, as well as the areas that are enrolling displaced students.

Without additional resources, our public schools, and colleges and universities will not be able to create an environment where our students can learn, which is absolutely critical for students who have been forced out of their old schools.

The school systems in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are in a state of crisis. Many schools on the island remain closed, without electricity and water, one month after Hurricane Maria hit the island. It could be several weeks or even months before students can return to their schools.

With numerous weeks and possibly months of closed doors, thousands of children are displaced and meet the federal definition of homelessness in the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act. Students are further challenged by a lack of food and a safe space that they have come to rely on at school.

It is vital that Congress consider these needs and provide significant funds to address the needs of students, families, and staff the areas affected by recent storms and natural disasters.

Across Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, our schools, Head Start agencies, and other early childhood education programs, will need substantial financial assistance to restart

school operations, capital funding to repair and rebuild facilities, and funding for supplemental health, including mental health services for students and staff affected by the storms.

As thousands of Puerto Rico residents are being forced to leave their homes and schools, LEAs in Florida, New York, and many other states are welcoming the families and children. While some have been able to temporarily relocate to mainland campuses, most students are left with few resources and limited options.

It is important that LEAs serving children from preschool through grade 12, Head Start agencies, colleges and universities have the necessary resources to provide a high-quality education for all of their students, especially evacuees who are trying to restart their education and rebuild their lives. In addition, these students may need additional language supports to learn the English language, which should be carefully considered as you put together additional aid packages.

In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Congress acted to ensure additional resources were allocated to ensure our schools could serve and educate children, especially those displaced by the storms. We ask Congress to take a similar approach that recognizes the financial needs of our schools to support students and their families experiencing homelessness in this time of dire need.

We stand ready to work with you to address the educational needs of all students affected by these devastating hurricanes. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator

Christopher Murphy
U.S. Senator

Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senator

Edward J. Markey
U.S. Senator

Richard Blumenthal
U.S. Senator

Kamala D. Harris
U.S. Senator