

December 20, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
232 United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
204 United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

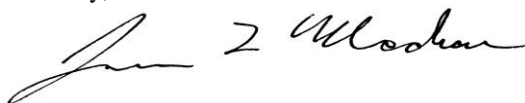
On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to urge Congress to quickly pass legislation to adequately fund Puerto Rico's and the U.S. Virgin Islands' Medicaid Programs. As you know, in September, Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These powerful hurricanes caused massive power outages, flooding, and structural damage, and, in the case of Puerto Rico, crippled the health care system on the island. Recovery has been slow, and residents of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are still confronting barriers to accessing much needed physical and mental health care. Adequate federal assistance through Medicaid is critically needed to ensure that Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands can provide needed care to individuals affected by these natural disasters.

The Medicaid program for low-income residents covers nearly half of Puerto Rico's residents. This rate is higher than any state. And, unlike state Medicaid programs, federal funding for Medicaid in the U.S. territories is provided through a block grant, e.g., a fixed amount of funding that is well below the territories' actual Medicaid costs. Moreover, federal Medicaid matching rates are capped at 55 percent for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition, while many of their residents have moved to the mainland, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands may continue to be responsible for paying health care costs for their Medicaid beneficiaries who have relocated, or may relocate in the future, to the mainland. In light of these financial rules and the economic impact of the hurricanes, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands urgently need additional resources to finance their current share of Medicaid costs so that their residents can receive the care they need.

After previous natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, Congress took several actions with respect to Medicaid funding to help the affected states, and we now urge Congress to consider similar steps for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In particular, Congress should consider temporarily increasing the federal Medicaid matching rate to 100 percent for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition, it is important for Congress to ensure that Medicaid-eligible evacuees from the territories who were forced to relocate to the mainland can maintain their Medicaid coverage. Following Katrina, Congress passed legislation to provide funding to pay the non-federal share of Medicaid costs for services provided under certain Medicaid waivers granted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We urge Congress to take similar action in this instance.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,



James L. Madara, MD