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November 15, 2017

Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, and after consultation with Members representing impacted areas, including Delegate Stacey Plaskett, I write to you today about our nation's natural disaster response policies and the long-term recovery for the communities that have been devastated by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

While recovery efforts get only a fraction of the media attention of the immediate response to a disaster, they have real, direct effects on the lives of disaster victims and their impacted communities. The decisions made by federal, state, and local governments determine when, how, and even if people can return to their homes and any semblance of normalcy returns to entire neighborhoods. Bad recovery policies can also destroy a community and turn a natural disaster into a manmade one.

The Members of the Congressional Black Caucus know this first hand. We represent 78 million people in diverse communities across the nation. As such, we represent people that have suffered through Katrina, Sandy, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, tornados, and lived through the recoveries that followed. So we know all too well the policies that help people rebuild and recover and, more often, we have seen what happens when they do not.

The progress of community recovery depends much less on the degree of damage than on the resources the residents have and the government assistance they receive. The key to a successful recovery is making sure that it includes everyone, allows people to participate in their own recovery, and invests in mitigation to ensure that communities are rebuilt stronger than before. When these conditions are not met, recovery is uneven, communities remain vulnerable to future

disasters, and neighborhoods languish. This is particularly true among poor and minority populations. In my hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana, we are still recovering not only from Katrina, but also from the failed response to the storm.

We cannot let that happen again. We cannot accept individual families and whole communities being left out of the recovery this time. Congress makes the laws and we have the power to improve them. We need to modernize our approach to disaster recovery and the Congressional Black Caucus has suggestions to do just that. We should simplify and expedite the process by which people receive assistance. We should provide more certainty to the people facing difficult, life-changing decisions. We should do more to prevent and mitigate disaster damage in the first place to save money and better protect people. We have enclosed ideas on how to accomplish all these goals and more and we hope you will work with us to achieve them.

Sincerely,



Cedric Richmond
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

Enclosure

CC: President Donald Trump
Mick Mulvaney, Director of the Office of Management and Budget