



October 6, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20544

Dear Chairman Pai:

As you are aware, Hurricane Maria effectively destroyed 100% of the power grid in Puerto Rico and rendered over 95% of the cell sites out of service immediately after the storm. Two weeks after and – as reported in the daily Federal Communications Commission (FCC) statistics – cell service outside of San Juan is still almost non-existent. Even in San Juan, more than 62.6% of cell sites remain inoperative. Landline based voice and Internet networks have suffered almost total degradation. The U.S. Virgin Islands communications systems were similarly ravaged not only by Hurricane Maria but weeks before by Hurricane Irma. Per FCC statistics, all of St. John's cell sites are still inoperative. This lack of even basic communications hampers essential emergency and medical services and undermines critical relief efforts. Additionally, while the people of these islands continue to work together to rebuild their lives, the inability to contact employers, education providers, and loved ones contributes to the ongoing sense of isolation and crisis.

We appreciate all the steps you have already taken, including issuing an order making immediately available up to \$76.9 million from the FCC's Universal Service Fund for the restoration of communications services in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. However, we write to ask you, and your fellow Commissioners, to take additional steps to highlight the communications crisis, reassure the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that the FCC is working for them, and to take any measures you can to assist in restoring emergency services. In the past, following Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, the FCC took significant pro-active measures to organize communications-focused relief operations and facilitate innovative efforts, which provided essential communications services and helped relieve people most impacted by the disaster.

For example, in 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin convened a telephone conference of industry providers, equipment manufacturers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to organize and coordinate a response to the complete destruction of communications in the region impacted by Hurricane Katrina. The FCC helped coordinate and encourage deployment of temporary wireless networks using Wi-Fi and other unlicensed spectrum, and authorized a low-power FM station in the parking lot of the Houston Astrodome to provide emergency relief information to the more than 10,000 evacuees sheltered in the Astrodome. In 2012, following Superstorm Sandy, the FCC helped broker a temporary roaming agreement between Verizon Wireless and T-Mobile to dramatically increase the availability of cell service to customers. Additionally, then-Chairman Genachowski and Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau Chief David Turetsky issued frequent bulletins to the press to

provide updates encouraging new and creative efforts by carriers – such as the extension of Wi-Fi hotspots by Time Warner Cable to provide basic communications between the people of New York City and their distant families and friends. Most recently, you and Commissioner Clyburn personally visited Florida to highlight ongoing restoration of service following Irma, and reassure the people of Florida who remained without communications that their government was doing everything it could to restore service.

Puerto Ricans and U.S. Virgin Islanders desperately need that type of targeted response. Local authorities, carriers, FEMA, and volunteer relief organizations could be working together to craft innovative solutions on how to restore critical communication services as well as how to rebuild a communications infrastructure that will survive the next storm. Additionally, we hope that you and your fellow Commissioners will visit the islands, speak directly with local authorities and communications providers to help assess and address the emergency, and remind disconnected islanders that they remain uppermost in the thoughts of their fellow Americans and their government officials.

Again, we appreciate all that you and the hardworking staff of the FCC have done – but this extraordinary disaster requires even more extraordinary measures to address it. As Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, you are in a unique position to organize immediate responses by carriers and other volunteers. Moreover, as the head of the agency charged with public safety communications, you are an essential resource for local government and safety officials in this time of crisis.

We look forward to working with you. Please let us know how we can be of service.

Sincerely,

National Hispanic Media Coalition
Center for Media Justice
Color of Change
Free Press
Public Knowledge

CC: The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner
The Honorable Michael O’Rielly, Commissioner
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner