



October 6, 2017

William B. Long
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Re: Removal of Statistics on FEMA's Website

Dear Administrator Long,

Thank you for the work that FEMA is doing to attempt to aid Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria. In the aftermath of a major disaster such as this, it is critical that the Federal government works aggressively to help American citizens who are in need of basic humanitarian relief like clean drinking water and electricity. An important component of this work is keeping the public informed about the progress in responding to this humanitarian crisis.

For this reason, we were troubled by the report in the *Washington Post* that FEMA has removed from its website information regarding access to drinking water and electricity in Puerto Rico.¹ At the same time, FEMA's website continues to provide other information about Puerto Rico's ongoing recovery from Hurricane Maria and related federal efforts.² We ask that you restore to your website the information that was removed and, going forward, that you accurately report all information about recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, regardless of how it might reflect on FEMA or the federal government more broadly.

We are deeply concerned about what appears to be an attempt to suppress or hide from the public negative information in order to create the appearance that the administration's efforts in Puerto Rico are proceeding flawlessly. First, and most urgently, the availability

¹ See Jenna Johnson, *FEMA removes statistics about drinking water access and electricity in Puerto Rico from website*, Wash. Post, Oct. 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/10/05/fema-removes-statistics-about-drinking-water-access-and-electricity-in-puerto-rico-from-website/?utm_term=.a287c4a62219.

² See <https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-maria>.

of accurate information is critical to recovery efforts and to protecting the lives and wellbeing of the people of Puerto Rico. Efforts to censor information about the actual conditions on the ground in Puerto Rico could complicate the work of aid organizations and deter individuals from donating to relief efforts.

Moreover, to put it simply, a functioning democracy should not censor or manipulate data or information about a matter of the utmost public concern. The government should not hide information from the people simply because it might embarrass those in power. That type of conduct is more typical of autocratic regimes and has no place in this country.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that you restore the deleted information to your website and that you report accurately on recovery efforts—both good news and bad—going forward. That way the American people can all come together to make sure the administration is doing everything it can to help fellow American citizens in need.

Sincerely,



Ben Berwick
Counsel
The Protect Democracy Project

Cc: Elaine C. Duke
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable John Roth
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528

Ron Johnson, Chairman
Claire McCaskill, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Michael McCaul, Chairman
Bennie Thompson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Homeland Security
176 FHOB
Washington, DC 20515-6480

2020 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, #163, Washington, DC 20006