

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 31, 2018

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear President Trump:

With June 1st serving as the official start to the 2018 Atlantic hurricane season already pre-empted by Subtropical Storm Alberto's landfall in the Florida Panhandle earlier this week, I write to respectfully reiterate my request that the administration conduct a thorough review of all existing federal regulations that can be relaxed to yield more effective and well-organized hurricane relief and response efforts. Within the last year, we witnessed Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria cause unprecedented destruction that left many still seeking a return to normalcy. As we continue to rebuild lives in communities impacted by these hurricanes, we also must look forward to addressing continuing bureaucratic inefficiencies to ensure a more robust federal response for the next disaster. Coordinated efforts across all federal agencies are of paramount importance to a successful and timely disaster response.

While confronting a life-altering natural disaster, too many Americans face a disjointed recovery process. Individuals, businesses, local governments, and nonprofit organizations in Florida must be free to focus on safe preparations and post-recovery activities without bearing the burden of arduous federal regulations that may inadvertently amplify obstacles to recovery. As the administration continues to focus on regulatory reform, I urge you to consider addressing regulations and rules that may impede affected individuals and communities from rebuilding their lives following natural disasters.

Americans are eager to see the federal government ensure that victims' health and safety needs are prioritized in carrying out disaster relief. To do so, requires a thoughtful assessment and revision of bureaucratic rules and regulations that hamper more than help storm survivors. Some examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

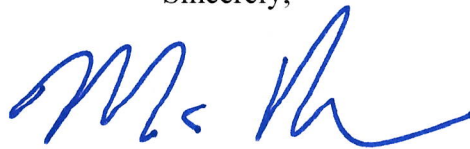
- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) must improve coordination with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Defense (DOD) when a major disaster declaration is issued, and use its authorities to the maximum extent possible to efficiently provide aid to persons and populations in need.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should move to fully enact Veterans Affairs Mission Act reforms so that veterans living in rural areas, such as the Florida Panhandle and the Florida Keys, have a full suite of medical service options available to them in their own communities as roads and highways are impacted by debris, flooding, traffic, and emergency response activities.

- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) should explore disaster policies whereby drone regulations can be temporarily and safely lifted during disaster declarations to facilitate emergency relief efforts, such as helping victims obtain medications when the roads to their homes are blocked.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) should ensure that there are sufficient protections in place for residents of HUD-assisted properties to prevent them from being forced back into living conditions that may have been made unsafe and unsanitary following a disaster.
- The Department of Agriculture (USDA) should consider an indefinite freeze on the proposed rule that would force all stores accepting food stamps to offer more food choices, including gas station convenience stores that are more likely to open quickly and be accessible following a disaster.
- The Department of Labor (DOL) should look to provide more flexibility to ensure that business reporting requirements do not paralyze businesses and workers whose most immediate priority should be providing assistance.
- The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) should expediently delay filing deadlines when necessary and consider rule reforms that enable disaster victims to make penalty-free early withdrawals from 401(k) and other retirement accounts.

As your administration continues to identify existing presidential authorities needed to provide essential regulatory relief, I respectfully request that you work directly with my office and the State of Florida to ease any other regulatory burdens associated with federal disaster relief and recovery that may require congressional assistance.

Thank you for your prompt attention and consideration on behalf of Floridians and all Americans that may be impacted during this year's hurricane season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator