

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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

June 1, 2017

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

Dear President Trump:

As today marks the official start of the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season, I respectfully request that your administration conduct a comprehensive review of all existing federal regulations that can be relaxed in order to facilitate more effective and efficient hurricane relief efforts. It is intolerable that in addition to confronting a natural disaster, people also need to navigate a complex web of excessive and overly burdensome federal regulations in the disaster's wake. Individuals, businesses, local governments, and nonprofit organizations in Florida must not be impeded in their hurricane response efforts by burdensome regulations that only exacerbate problems and delay community recovery.

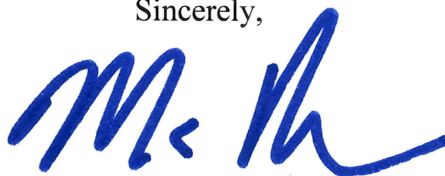
As your administration continues its focus on regulatory reform, I urge you to consider regulations, rules, and bureaucratic red tape that may hinder or constrain Americans' abilities to rebuild their lives and communities following disasters. Still recovering from the impacts of last year's Hurricanes Hermine and Matthew, Floridians are eager to see Washington, D.C. refocus and refine the government's disaster relief mission to ensure that meeting victims' needs is always the immediate priority.

As many will agree, the federal government must prioritize victims' health and safety in the aftermath of a storm. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) must do a better job to streamline coordination with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) 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. Additionally, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should move to fully enact Veterans Choice Program reforms so that veterans living in rural areas like Florida's Panhandle or 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. Meanwhile 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 federal government must also recognize that some well-intentioned rules have dramatic consequences on the ability of people and communities to sustain themselves in the immediate aftermath of a storm when federal resources may not yet be available. For example, 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. And the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) should consider rule reforms that enable disaster victims to make penalty-free early withdrawals from 401(k) and other retirement accounts.

These are just a sample of federal regulatory issues that have had a negative impact on Floridians following natural disasters. As you go about your important work to target existing presidential authorities which could provide much needed regulatory relief, I also request that you work with my office and the State of Florida to help identify any other regulatory burdens associated with federal disaster relief and recovery that would require congressional action to relax or correct. Thank you for your consideration, and I stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator