

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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

October 22, 2018

The Honorable Brock Long
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Long:

I write to express concern regarding findings from the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) observations released on September 27, 2018, of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) debris monitoring efforts for Hurricane Irma and to encourage FEMA to expeditiously implement the recommendations set forth. I believe prompt attention is even more critical given that Florida has now sustained another major disaster and many Florida communities with limited resources will need to be protected from potential waste, fraud and abuse in the debris removal process.

While I recognize the difficult task FEMA was presented last year responding to three major hurricanes, this report highlighted serious deficiencies in FEMA's debris removal guidance that must be addressed. According to the report, the majority of Florida municipalities the OIG visited relied on contractors to perform debris monitoring. The OIG found this may have resulted from FEMA's elimination of debris monitor responsibilities from its Public Assistance (PA) guidance. This omission led to a system where sub-recipients employed new, temporary hires or contractors for debris monitoring. However, FEMA only provided training for these individuals upon request. Thus, in many instances, there was no direct oversight by FEMA over debris operations, leading to an increased risk of fraud, waste, and abuse to Florida's communities.

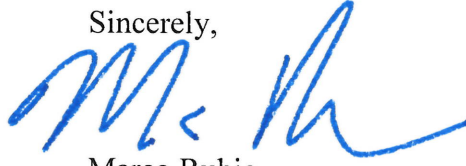
More specifically, it is also my understanding that Florida debris removal sites visited by the OIG did not contain weight scales, and the monitors at these sites did not measure tree stumps as requested. This resulted in higher removal costs as debris haulers could persuade untrained monitors to estimate their debris loads at higher levels, even when the loads appeared to be much smaller in size.

The OIG report highlighted serious concerns with federal oversight of the debris removal process, but also provided important recommendations that must be promptly implemented, such as developing and updating Public Assistance removal guidance, which will allow for increased oversight capabilities and quality control methods for verifying debris amounts collected. While FEMA concurs with the recommendations, the agency also indicated that its estimated completion date is August 30, 2019. I encourage FEMA to address these recommendations

expeditiously given their importance to the State of Florida in helping our communities repair and rebuild from the devastation caused by Hurricane Michael.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

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