

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE FEDERAL RESPONSE TO NATURAL DISASTERS IN PUERTO RICO ACT OF 2018

House Leads: Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY), Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Original co-sponsors: Bennie G. Thompson (MS), Joseph Crowley (NY), José E. Serrano (NY), Luis V. Gutiérrez (IL), Rosa L. DeLauro (CT), Raúl M. Grijalva (AZ), David N. Cicilline (RI), Elijah E. Cummings (MD), Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ), Adriano Espaillat (NY), Darren Soto (FL), Donald M. Payne, Jr. (NJ), Ruben Gallego (AZ), Anna G. Eshoo (CA)

Senate Leads: Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), Elizabeth Warren (MA)

This bill establishes a Commission to examine the federal response to the 2017 natural disasters in Puerto Rico. Their final report must consider the full scope of the federal response, before, during, and after the Hurricanes, and put forward recommendations on how to guard against future natural disasters. The Commission will specifically investigate:

- Federal preparedness activities prior to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, including federal plans for 2017 hurricane season and decision-making regarding repositioning contracts; and
- Federal response activities during Hurricanes Irma and Maria, including federal coordination, distribution of assistance, and contracting; and
- Federal recovery activities after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, including federal efforts to obtain accurate accounting of death toll, damage impacts, and long-term rebuilding assistance for survivors.

In the course of their investigation, the Commission shall consider the following:

- adequacy of death toll methodology and processes, and whether previous death counts and mortality estimates slowed or otherwise affected federal response efforts;
- the federal emergency and contingency plans in place before the 2017 hurricane season;
- implications of Puerto Rico's reliance on imported oil for power generation;
- adequacy of the telecommunications network in Puerto Rico;
- impact of the uncertainty in long-term federal healthcare funding on medical and emergency readiness; geographic, ecologic, and infrastructure issues that could have affected response efforts;
- capacity of the local and federal government to quickly mobilize and respond to disasters and emergencies in Puerto Rico; and
- adequacy of available data and its effects on the federal response.

The report shall take into account the number and nature of complaints filed to the Inspectors General of federal agencies responsible for in the aftermath of the 2017 natural disasters; details on federal procurement and acquisition practices in the aftermath of the 2017 natural disasters; details on disaster mitigation protocols given cultural and language differences; and disaster response processes taking into account demographics (age, race, gender, income) and the impact on segments of the population with disabilities.

The Commission will be composed of 8 members and shall be appointed no later than 30 days after the date of enactment. The Commission must hold at least 10 public meetings in locations accessible to individuals of every municipality with elected officials, local community leaders, academic institutions, for-profit and non-for-profit organizations, and individuals in Puerto Rico. The Commission must also allow for written input from members of the diaspora and people in Puerto Rico for inclusion in the appendix of the final report.