



January 8, 2019

Representative Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2365 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

**Association of State and
Territorial Health Officials**

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Dear Chairwoman Lowey:

On behalf of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) I am writing in support of the emergency disaster appropriations bill that was introduced during the first week of January to assist Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa as they recover from recent natural disasters.

This bill would provide much needed relief to Puerto Rico's nutrition programs, where if these funds are not approved by March, an estimated 1.3 million Puerto Ricans will see their Nutrition Assistance Program benefits reduced and 100,000 will lose their benefits entirely according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Puerto Rico is still in the process of rebuilding from Hurricane Maria. The Northern Mariana Islands are also using the nutrition funds to support their populations as they get back on their feet after Typhoon Yutu. Relief from the Medicaid matching requirement will help these jurisdictions in their recovery activities by relieving the burden of this expenditure while they rebuild after two major typhoons that impacted those islands last year.

ASTHO specifically appreciates these provisions included in the bill:

- \$600 million in additional funding to continue disaster nutrition benefits in Puerto Rico during its continued recovery from Hurricane Maria
- \$10.2 million in the bill for nutrition assistance for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands following typhoons in September and October.
- \$52 million to support health services in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa through their Medicaid programs, including waiving the local matching requirement for the remainder of FY19.

We look forward to working with you on this bill of utmost importance and strongly encourage its swift approval in the House and Senate. Thank you for your leadership and we look forward to working with you on this and other public health issues of importance. Please contact Carolyn McCoy, the senior director of government affairs at cmccoy@astho.org if you require additional information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
President, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Director, Rhode Island Department of Health

CC: Senator Richard Shelby, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee