



Working to Reduce Poverty in America.

May 2, 2016

United States Senate

Dear Senator,

I write to you today on behalf of Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) and its national network of membership organizations regarding the ongoing financial and humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico.

CCUSA represents more than 160 diocesan Catholic Charities member agencies, including our member agency Caritas de Puerto Rico. These agencies operate more than 2,600 service locations across 49 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories.

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Sr. Donna Markham OP, PhD

The ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico has seen the demands for services and programs at Caritas de Puerto Rico expand five-fold in the last five years. In 2015 alone, Caritas de Puerto Rico served over 78,000 people, all of whom were living under the poverty line and nearly a third of whom were vulnerable children. The demand for food, led to Caritas de Puerto Rico operating 77 soup kitchens and serving 56,649 meals to families in need. Everything was achieved with the dedicated support of only 13 employees, 20 part-time staff, and 510 faithful volunteers.

This reality is a reminder that those suffering under this crisis are those who least contributed to its creation. Sadly, despite the heroic efforts of charitable organizations and volunteers, the needs of people far exceed the ability of these organizations to respond. The solution, therefore should be focused on helping the people of Puerto Rico: those unable to find work, those working to feed and shelter their families and those forced to emigrate in order to build a future. The ongoing suffering from poverty, hunger, joblessness, and lack of access to quality healthcare and education demonstrates that the solutions to improving the situation in Puerto Rico cannot be shouldered solely by those who are suffering under the weight of the crisis.

We therefore urge Congress to find a workable solution that prioritizes the needs of people. A solution that promotes budget transparency, reduces child poverty and ensures strong provisions to restructure the debt in a manner that is timely, comprehensive and orderly.

I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna J. Markham, OP, PhD".

Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD
President & CEO
Catholic Charities USA

