

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 25, 2024

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

We ask you to include H.R. 5324, the Housing Survivors of Major Disasters Act, in any end-of-year emergency disaster funding package. This bipartisan legislation, introduced by Representatives Adriano Espaillat and Jenniffer González-Colón, will provide a lifeline to disaster survivors nationwide by ensuring that housing assistance is equitable and accessible, particularly for the hardest-hit, underserved communities. This bill addresses a truly bipartisan issue that affects Americans in red and blue states alike, especially across the Gulf Coast, which continues to suffer from an unprecedented wave of destructive natural disasters.

Communities along the Gulf Coast are experiencing intensified storms that displace thousands, destabilize housing, and drive vulnerable families into homelessness. After Hurricane Michael struck Bay County, Florida, in 2019, local leaders estimated that 20,000 residents were left homeless—over 10% of the population in this community of 185,000. Nearly three-fourths of the damaged properties in Bay County were rental homes, leaving residents scrambling for housing only to face skyrocketing rents due to supply shortages. Temporary housing support from FEMA has been insufficient, often expiring after six months, with few extension approvals. Thousands are left living in damaged homes, tents, and other uninhabitable structures, unable to access stable shelter.

This crisis affects communities across the country. In 2023 alone, an estimated 2.5 million Americans were displaced by weather-related disasters. More than one-third of these individuals experienced food shortages in the first month of displacement, over half encountered fraud attempts, and more than a third were displaced for longer than a month. The U.S. faced 28 billion-dollar-plus disasters last year, yet our disaster response system is piecemeal, leaving far too many vulnerable families without reliable help.

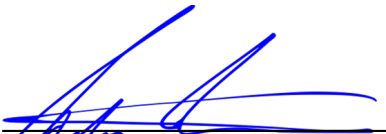
H.R. 5324 directly addresses these gaps. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Maria, FEMA initially denied nearly 60% of Puerto Rican applications under the Individuals and Households Program (IHP) due to a lack of formal title documentation despite longstanding residency. In response, FEMA revised its policy in 2021 to accept alternative forms of documentation such as

real estate tax receipts, driver's licenses, and utility bills. H.R. 5324 would make this policy permanent, ensuring that all survivors can access critical assistance without bureaucratic barriers.

With climate-related disasters growing more severe and frequent, Congress must act to ensure that all disaster survivors receive comprehensive and consistent support, no matter their zip code. Including H.R. 5324 in the year-end disaster funding package is a necessary and urgent step toward this goal.

Thank you for considering the immediate needs of disaster survivors nationwide.

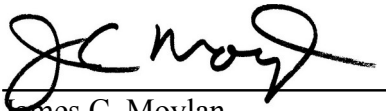
Sincerely,




Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress




Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress




James C. Moylan
Member of Congress




André Carson
Member of Congress




Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress




Raul Ruiz, M.D.
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Timothy M. Kennedy
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Sylvia R. Garcia
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