

Massachusetts Puerto Rico Hurricane Response Efforts

The Commonwealth has been committed to supporting disaster relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Maria by providing critical services for thousands of survivors who have evacuated to Massachusetts from Puerto Rico for the last eight months. Working in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Massachusetts is providing a wide range of services and direct support to evacuees including temporary shelter accommodations and housing search assistance, employment search assistance and training, educational support, health care, behavioral and mental health services, transportation assistance, and access to other social and basic needs such as food and clothing.

There are approximately 1,900 households, totaling nearly 4,600 individuals, who have registered for FEMA disaster assistance and are currently living in Massachusetts, having evacuated from Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria. Massachusetts has the third highest FEMA registered population of Hurricane Maria evacuees of all of the continental United States.

Most of the nearly 1,900 households registered with FEMA have been able to find housing on their own or with family or friends. However, nearly 460 households are living in hotels. Of these, there are approximately 330 households now living in hotels funded by FEMA through the Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) program, and an additional 134 households (who are no longer eligible for TSA) placed in hotels funded by the Commonwealth through a partnership with the American Red Cross.

FEMA has conducted periodic TSA eligibility reviews, and has extended the program for eligible evacuees several times. On May 3rd, FEMA announced that, in response to a request by the Governor of Puerto Rico, they would grant one final extension of the TSA program for all current TSA eligible evacuee households through June 30, 2018. After that date, FEMA will end the TSA program, no longer funding hotel placements for evacuees, and anticipates evacuees will use other disaster assistance available to them to support their housing needs.

Consistent with the federal deadline for TSA, the Commonwealth-funded Red Cross housing program will also end on June 30, 2018. In addition, new households are no longer being accepted into the Red Cross housing program as of May 18th.

In anticipation of federal TSA benefits and the Commonwealth-funded Red Cross housing program both expiring on June 30th, the Commonwealth will continue to work directly with families and individuals in these hotel placements to assist them in returning home to Puerto Rico or finding stable housing and employment here in Massachusetts.

Below are more details about current assistance efforts:

Transitional Housing

- FEMA has been providing Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) to eligible evacuees in Massachusetts. The current TSA hotel population is 327 households.
- The Commonwealth, through an agreement between the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross, has provided temporary housing support through hotel placements for those evacuees who are not eligible for FEMA's TSA benefits. A total of 230 households have been supported by this program, with 134 households currently placed. The Commonwealth, through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Family Resource Centers (FRCs), has successfully transitioned numerous families out of the Red Cross housing program by assisting them in finding longer-term housing or

assisting eligible families in accessing the Commonwealth's transportation program to return home to Puerto Rico (see below for more details on the transportation program).

- As we prepare for both the federal TSA and the Commonwealth's housing program through the American Red Cross to expire June 30th, the Commonwealth is actively working with evacuees to support them in returning home to Puerto Rico or in finding stable housing and employment here in Massachusetts. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) Family Resource Centers (FRCs) and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Regional Administrative Agencies (RAAs) continue to work with households to provide this assistance.
- It is important to note that Massachusetts has a limited affordable housing stock and there are significant waiting lists for both subsidy programs and low income housing. It is likely evacuees will not become eligible for affordable housing for a very long time and will not move up the waiting lists in time for the June 30th deadline. The Commonwealth is working diligently on housing search efforts for families and individuals who have chosen to stay in Massachusetts. However, if evacuees currently staying in federal- and state-funded hotels choose not to return home to Puerto Rico and are unsuccessful in finding more stable housing (whether independently or with family and friends) by June 30th, other housing options may be limited.

Employment

- The Commonwealth's Career Centers have enrolled over 1,300 evacuees for career assistance services. Labor and Workforce Development and Career Center staff are working closely with the business community to identify employment opportunities, coordinating job fair events and trainings, and even making recruitment site visits to hotels where evacuees are housed to assist job-seekers.

Education

- Massachusetts school districts have enrolled more than 3,000 students from Puerto Rico. The Baker-Polito Administration, together with the House and Senate, secured \$15 million in funding in Fiscal Year 2018 to support districts whose schools had welcomed evacuees, and all three Fiscal Year 2019 budgets have proposed an additional appropriation of \$15 million to continue to support these school districts.

Social Services

- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has served as the lead in coordinating with the network of 22 Family Resource Centers (FRC's) to provide assistance to evacuees. Nearly 3,000 families and 7,800 individual adults and children have received center based support and referrals to a vast network of community providers.
- The Department of Transitional Assistance has had over 12,100 applicants for various benefits.

Transportation Assistance

- The Commonwealth activated a transportation assistance program to assist evacuees who do not have adequate financial means in obtaining airfare to return home to Puerto Rico. To date, the Commonwealth has assisted 87 evacuees in returning home by purchasing airline tickets. (See below for more details on how to access the Commonwealth's transportation grant program.)

- On May 3rd, FEMA announced the implementation of a federal transportation assistance program to assist evacuees in obtaining transportation home to Puerto Rico. This program is limited to evacuees currently housed in TSA hotels, and will end on July 1, 2018. (See below for more details on how to access the FEMA transportation program.)

Going Forward

- Once again, it is important to note that the Transitional Shelter Assistance benefits (TSA) will be terminated June 30th.
- FEMA is now providing a transportation grant that will pay for airline tickets back to Puerto Rico for current TSA households. Contact FEMA disaster assistance number at **1-800-621-FEMA (1-800-621-3362)** or **TTY 1-800-462-7585**. In addition, the Commonwealth will continue to provide transportation back to Puerto Rico for anyone who meets our eligibility requirements and is not eligible for FEMA transportation resources. More information on how to access the Commonwealth's transportation assistance program can be found by calling 211 or by contacting your local FRC. Please visit <https://www.frcma.org/locations> to identify the FRC closest to you.
- Households who do not wish to return to Puerto Rico or are unable to locate housing from available Massachusetts housing inventory will be encouraged to identify other housing options with friends and families as TSA and Red Cross temporary housing will not be available after June 30th. The Commonwealth, through the RAAs, will continue to provide housing search assistance.
- The Commonwealth, through the FRCs, will continue to provide case management services and assist evacuees with accessing social services. In addition, federal case managers provided through the Immediate Disaster Case Management (IDCM) program will continue providing case management support to families through July 2, 2018.
- Massachusetts will continue to provide job search assistance and access to training for evacuees and now these efforts have been infused with federal grant funding to assist evacuees in finding employment including receiving training specific to available employment and English-language assistance. Evacuee households can contact their local career center **(617) 626-5075** or visit <https://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-one-stop-career-centers/locations> for assistance related to employment.
- Evacuees can continue to apply for state benefits, but will have to meet the same eligibility requirements as other Massachusetts residents.