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Plaskett Introduces Bill With Aim to Improve Resiliency as Territory Rebuilds

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett at Government House on St. Croix in 2016 By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

Delegate to Congress Stacey E. Plaskett recently introduced legislation in the House of Representatives that would allow the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico access to federal money to rebuild additional infrastructure that is more “resilient” than before the devastating 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Ms. Plaskett has released the following statement regarding the legislation, H.R. 5756, or the Resiliency Enhancement Act of 2020:

“In the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, there was a recognition from Congress as to the sweeping destruction inflicted on the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017,” Ms. Plaskett said. “FEMA was given flexibility to make repairs and replace infrastructure on the islands to incorporate resilient design and features, regardless of pre-disaster condition (the standard that normally applies). However, eligibility was limited to infrastructure providing critical services – schools, hospitals, utilities, etc.”

Under the bill, assistance does not apply to damages caused by disasters declared after 2017, such as the recent earthquakes in Puerto Rico, without congressional action.

The Resiliency Enhancement Act does expand funding eligibility to include roads, bridges, ports, airports, affordable housing, and stormwater infrastructure as the islands rebuild from 2017. If enacted, provisions of the bill would apply to any major disaster declared in the Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico through fiscal year 2022.

“With climate change fixed on the radar of corporate and civil risk managers around the world, more and more attention needs to turn towards resilience and working out effective measures and solutions for global disaster loss reduction. This bill will do just that,” reads the statement.

The bipartisan legislation has 9 co-sponsors, including Congresswoman González-Colón of Puerto Rico, and has been referred to the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, which will hopefully approve it for consideration by the full House of Representatives in the next few weeks.

“With climate change fixed on the radar of corporate and civil risk managers around the world, more and more attention needs to turn towards resilience and working out effective measures and solutions for global disaster loss reduction. This bill will do just that,” Ms. Plaskett said.