October 2, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran  The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman  Chairman
Committee on Appropriations  Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education
Room S-128, The Capitol  Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chairman  Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations  Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education
Room S-128, The Capitol  Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

The American Society of Hematology is contacting you to urge swift passage of relief funding to Puerto Rico. The impact and aftermath of Hurricane Maria has greatly affected hematologists and the patients they serve and we are writing to share some stories with you to help you understand the situation on the ground.

ASH represents over 17,000 clinicians and scientists worldwide, who are committed to the study and treatment of blood and blood-related diseases. These disorders encompass malignant hematologic disorders such as leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma, as well as non-malignant conditions such as sickle cell anemia, thalassemia, bone marrow failure, venous thromboembolism, and hemophilia. In addition, hematologists have been pioneers in demonstrating the potential of treating various hematologic diseases; and we continue to be innovators in the field of stem cell biology, regenerative medicine, transfusion medicine, and gene therapy. ASH membership is comprised of basic, translational, and clinical scientists, as well as physicians who are providing care to patients in diverse settings including teaching and community hospitals, as well as private practices.

Specific examples of Hurricane Maria’s devastating impact on hematology practice are as follows:

- The lack of blood products is an issue for all hospitals. For example, we are aware that three days ago, in the hematology/oncology ward at Auxilio Mutuo Hospital in San Juan, there were at least eight patients needing platelet transfusions, and the blood bank had run out of blood products. The hospital’s usual backup is Florida, but without reliable flights, there will be a continuing shortage of critically needed blood products.
• Bone marrow biopsies and special diagnostics tests are all routinely sent to the mainland for testing using FedEx services. Without access to reliable flights, physicians will not be able to diagnose diseases of very ill patients.

• Millions of dollars in chemotherapy drugs were lost when offices around the island lost power.

• Diesel is needed for the power plants at the hospitals and office buildings where doctors’ offices are located so that patient care can resume.

• Gasoline is needed so that people can get to work and rebuild, and for hematology and oncology patients to get their care.

• Pharmacies aren't being restocked because of lack of fuel for trucks, and the supplies are languishing in the docks. Stores also need diesel for their refrigerators.

Again, ASH urges swift passage of emergency funding and a well-coordinated response effort from the Federal Government so that the citizens of Puerto Rico can receive necessary and needed emergency relief. Please reach out to Suzanne Leous, Director of Government Relations and Practice (sleous@hematology.org), if you need additional information or assistance related to this request.

Sincerely,

Kenneth C. Anderson, MD
President