



CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
MARTIN J. WALSH

October 31, 2019

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz
Chair, Joint Committee on Children,
Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Kay Khan
Chair, Joint Committee on Children,
Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House, Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Chang-Diaz, Chair Khan, and Members of the Committee:

Today, I write in strong support of H.149, *A resolve to better prepare the Commonwealth for Climate Change Refugees* filed by Representative Miranda. In the City of Boston, we work to strengthen the ability of immigrants and refugees to fully participate in the economic, civic, social, and cultural life of our great City.

Although almost all of the evacuees were U.S. citizens, the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement was involved in response efforts due to our experience in welcoming newcomers to our City and assisting their efforts to settle in the City, such as finding housing, health care, and education. Furthermore, our office is accustomed to serving linguistically and culturally diverse communities.

In September 2017, after Hurricane Maria struck several Caribbean islands, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, representatives from many City of Boston departments convened to develop and implement the City's response. Many evacuees were anticipated to arrive in Massachusetts, as there are several large and well-established Puerto Rican communities present here and it was expected that those from hurricane-affected areas would want to relocate (at least temporarily) to another location and stay with family or friends.

Our Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) and our Office of Housing Stability (OHS), with the support of Boston Public Schools, convened a group of regional organizations and agencies to support families who were displaced from Puerto Rico by Hurricane Maria. The City and its partners provided coordinated housing, education, job training, and other support services to displaced families in Boston and in the Greater Boston Area. Boston itself supported 142 households displaced by Hurricane Maria. I want to note that we count a household as families with children (under 21), single adult individuals, and adult-only families. From these 142 households, 193 students entered into our Boston Public School system.

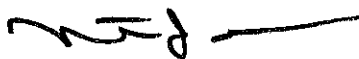
We worked to ensure any child arriving in Boston received uninterrupted education. BPS proactively worked to enroll any student and provide a welcoming environment they could call

~~home. Boston Public Schools collected more than 1,000 winter coats, hats, and gloves through numerous philanthropic and community organizations to help Puerto Rican families, we also provided 36 Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners to Puerto Rican families thanks to a donation from the Belmont Hill School (a private school in Belmont, Mass.) The City of Boston collected more than 200 Three Kings Day gifts for 60 Puerto Rican families in BPS. Additionally, 13 teenagers were taken on a shopping spree with Mayor Walsh. Our Boston Public Health Commission provided disaster behavioral health support for partner organizations supporting evacuees. BPHC helped individuals and families navigate the healthcare system and provided case management.~~

These are just a few examples of what the City did to support those affected by Hurricane Maria. With all of these efforts, there is more we can do and could have done as communities across Massachusetts. Let us show that we understand that Hurricane Maria is not an isolated incident. Climate change is real and there will be more natural disasters in the future. Given that we anticipate more instances of climate refugees, however, in the future we must have a proactive plan with best practices.

The passage of this bill will provide greater insight into what worked and what systemic deficits still exist that will prevent Massachusetts from effectively supporting new climate refugees in the future. On behalf of Mayor Walsh, I hope this committee reports this bill out favorably. I respectfully request your support of this bill and thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly or you may contact Alyssa Ring in the Office of Intergovernmental Relations at (617) 635-1994.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Walsh
Mayor of Boston