



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD
JONATHAN F. MITCHELL, MAYOR

October 31, 2017

Governor Charlie Baker
Office of the Governor
State House, Boston 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

As you know, communities across Massachusetts, including New Bedford, continue to experience a number of families relocating from Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria's devastation. I write to advocate for resources to support these families.

Nowhere has the immediate impact been felt more than in our schools. In New Bedford's public schools, 51 students to date have been registered from families relocating from Puerto Rico. Under current state policies, districts adding students after October 1 are not eligible for more funding under Chapter 70. I encourage you to consider providing municipalities with relief from the October 1 deadline so that state aid can better reflect true need. This relief is especially important, as the arriving population of students may be designated English Learners or require special education or other student services. With your leadership, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is in a position to act to ensure that districts have the tools and resources they need to appropriately support additional students.

Our other major concern in New Bedford, as in other communities across the Commonwealth, is ensuring that these new residents are sheltered. Not unlike other cities, we do not have the permanent housing stock to accommodate large-scale relocation to the city, and there is not sufficient temporary shelter to offer. The state-funded Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) could aid new residents by providing vouchers. Increased Emergency Assistance from the Department of Transitional Assistance and HomeBASE housing assistance could also benefit the new residents. Of note, the New Bedford Housing Authority already has 2,000 on its waiting list for subsidized housing, making any additional demand for this housing problematic.

For our part, know that New Bedford has not been idle. We have formed a working group to ensure that housing, health and education agencies – both public and private – are aligned. We will continue doing our best to accommodate the influx of victims of Hurricane Maria so that those who have suffered through this disaster find aid and support in my City. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,


Jon Mitchell
Mayor