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**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY, DEPUTY MAYOR HERMINIA PALACIO
ANNOUNCE DEPLOYMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS TO PUERTO RICO**

The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City will also provide a \$100,000 grant to the Hispanic Federation's UNIDOS to increase behavioral health services in Puerto Rico; the Hispanic Federation will match the grant to bring the total new support to \$200,000

NEW YORK — First Lady Chirlane McCray and Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio today announced the deployment of a 12-person team of mental and behavioral health experts from the New York City Health Department to train school staff across Puerto Rico in psychological first aid for students who have experienced trauma and emotional challenges in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Additionally, the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City will provide a grant of \$100,000 to the Hispanic Federation's UNIDOS Program to increase mental health services in Puerto Rico as part of the city's support to recovery efforts in the island.

The Hispanic Federation's UNIDOS Disaster Relief & Recovery Program will match the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City grant of \$100,000, bringing the total new support for community health centers in Puerto Rico to \$200,000.

First Lady McCray and Deputy Mayor Dr. Palacio will travel to Puerto Rico Tuesday to meet with the Mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulin Cruz, the Mayor of Loiza, Julia Nazario, and public health and education officials to identify existing service challenges and gaps that may be addressed with additional technical resources from ThriveNYC and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

"New Yorkers have a strong bond with Puerto Rico and the people of our City have never hesitated to help our Puerto Rican sisters and brothers in a time of great need," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray, Chair of the Mayor's Fund and who leads the City's mental health and substance misuse efforts**. "As NYC continues to stand with Puerto Rico, we understand that healing emotional pain is not as straightforward as rebuilding physical structures, or restoring cell service. With this deployment of psychological first aid trainers and an investment in

behavioral health services, New York City acknowledges the long road ahead and will assist with the lingering emotional and mental challenges of recovery.”

“It’s both understandable and right that in the immediate aftermath of a disaster we focus first on health and safety,” said **Dr. Herminia Palacio, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services**. “But as the response effort continues, we begin to see how trauma and stress of the disaster can leave invisible wounds and lasting effects. That’s why we’re training 3,000 teachers across Puerto Rico with Psychological First Aid skills they can use to help themselves and their students during this time of recovery.”

“Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray, New York City continues to support Puerto Rico during its time of greatest need. Our organizational mandate is to support actions that can help Puerto Rico rise up better, stronger and more self-sufficient,” said **José Calderón, President of the Hispanic Federation**. “Puerto Rico is having a serious mental health crisis, and we’re so grateful that our city’s First Lady has taken a leading role to support and shine a light on the mental health needs of our neighbors on the island. We are very proud to work with the First Lady and The Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City to establish a \$200,000 Fund to increase behavioral health services at community health centers in Puerto Rico. It is essential support that will help provide critical help for many of our people on the island.”

“New York City is committed to assisting our colleagues in Puerto Rico as they engage in the hard work of rebuilding the public health infrastructure and develop mental health supports following last year’s devastating hurricane season,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett**. “The Health Department is fortunate to have the expertise in disaster mental health response and recovery and a robust Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response to assist with the complex logistical issues associated with a mission of such magnitude.”

“Our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico need our help as they cope with the trauma from the hurricanes. On our deployment last December to Puerto Rico, we saw the urgent need for mental health resources on the island, especially among children. I want to thank Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray for their steadfast commitment to the island and their support to ongoing recovery efforts,” said **Health Department First Deputy Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot**.

This deployment of mental health experts is a response to a request for assistance by the Department of Education in Puerto Rico and reflects the de Blasio Administration’s strong tie between New York City and Puerto Rico, and the City’s continued commitment to rebuilding and restoring Puerto Rico over the long haul.

During its two week deployment, New York City Health Department staff will offer mental health training sessions each day throughout Puerto Rico, including in San Juan and Mayaguez to up to 3,000 education staff in Puerto Rico on post-disaster stress management and self-care to support their coping, and post-disaster recovery. The trainings will focus on stress management, self-care, and the importance of seeking mental health support for early intervention, and are based on evidence-based practice that reduces Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

To build capacity for mental and behavioral health interventions for school staff in Puerto Rico, the team will work with school social workers through a “train-the-trainer” model. The goal is to train up to 1,000 social workers on mental and behavioral health curricula to help Puerto Rico’s Department of Education continue the trainings on the island in the coming months.

The Mayor’s Fund \$100,000 grant to Hispanic Federation/UNIDOS, and the \$100,000 matching funds from the Hispanic Federation, will supplement behavioral health services and address unmet needs related to behavioral health services at community health centers in Puerto Rico. The Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City has donated \$30,000 to the International Medical Corps to support the deployment of mobile medical units that provide primary care to hurricane-affected residents who do not have access to health facilities, and \$70,000 to the Hispanic Federation/UNIDOS Disaster Relief & Recovery Program to support general relief and recovery projects in Puerto Rico.

The Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City received donations from City employees via automatic payroll deductions, and from online donations from everyday New Yorkers.

Last November, the New York City Health Department deployment to assess Puerto Rico’s public health needs identified mental health in schools a significant gap. Following the fact-finding mission after Hurricane Maria, the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDOE) extended an invitation to the DOHMH to train their education systems staff on post-disaster stress management and self-care. DOHMH-Division of Mental Hygiene agreed to provide a series of four-hour long Stress Management and Self Care after Disasters Trainings for Teachers and Education System Staff in Puerto Rico, up to thirty-six (36) sessions in nine days.

The Health Department’s Division of Mental Hygiene’s Office of Community Resilience (OCR), under the leadership of Dr. Oxiris Barbot, First Deputy Commissioner at DOHMH, and Dr. Gary Belkin, Executive Deputy Commissioner at DOHMH, took the central role in preparing the team for this mission. Office of Community Resilience (OCR) staff has also provided mental health support at the City’s service center opened last year to support individuals and families recovering from Hurricanes Maria, Irma and Harvey. The OCR staff provided on-site mental health support to 1,397 members of the public and assisted clients with referrals with sister agencies and community-based organizations that provide mental health services.

Since its creation after the 9/11 disaster, OCR has been leading the disaster mental health planning, preparedness and response in New York City. This deployment marks a key shift for the Health Department as it is the first time the agency has deployed a team of disaster mental health responders outside New York City to help fellow Americans affected by a disaster.

“Hurricane Maria was a storm for the ages, and we as New Yorkers must help our friends in Puerto Rico,” said **Council Speaker Corey Johnson**. “I thank the First Lady for taking these important steps to address their mental health needs. They have a difficult road ahead, but we will do everything we can to help them find the way to recovery.”

“The residents of Puerto Rico have been ignored by the Trump Administration and it is up to each of us, New Yorkers doing what’s right, to help our fellow American citizens rebuild following last year’s devastation,” said **Representative Adriano Espailat**. “Next week marks six months since Hurricane Maria first made landfall. Within that time, we have witnessed a growing humanitarian crisis as homes remain without roofs; buildings, hospitals and schools remain without electricity; clean water is scarce; and the infrastructure and roadways continue to crumble. It is traumatic to lose your home or your school without the resources to rebuild, and the trauma is even greater for the most vulnerable individuals within the community, our youth and senior citizens. We must continue our work to address the daily and long-term challenges that these families face until Puerto Rico is fully restored.”

“The people of Puerto Rico need all the help they can get as they recover from the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. That includes improving their mental health as well, and these trainers will help provide Puerto Rico’s schools with the staff they need to assist their students as they recover from this disaster. I thank First Lady McCray for her commitment to the mental well-being of the people of Puerto Rico,” said **Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.**

“The trauma caused by Hurricane María has catalyzed a mental health crisis among our fellow Americans living in Puerto Rico,” said **Council Member Diana Ayala, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health**. “Suicide rates on the island have increased since the storm because of the profound loss residents continue to endure. To mitigate this, it is imperative to include mental health resources in our approach to help Puerto Rico recover. As Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, I am grateful to Mayor de Blasio, First Lady Chirlane McCray, Deputy Mayor Palacios, and the Health Department for their commitment to addressing the emotional and mental trauma facing Puerto Ricans.”

“I thank First Lady McCray and the service providers for taking on this essential mission. As a New Yorker with family and friends on the island, I’m proud to see our City invest in the physical, emotional and mental well-being of Puerto Rico. These mental health services will address a growing crisis on the island as thousands of Americans continue to suffer from a dwindling federal response to this historic disaster,” said **Councilwoman Carlina Rivera**. “New York City will never leave Puerto Rico behind, and I look forward to our city continuing to provide aid in the coming months to Puerto Ricans on the island, as well as to those who were forced to relocate to the Five Boroughs and are facing their own set of challenges.”

State Senator Gustavo Rivera Ranker of the Senate Health Committee said, "In the last few months, Puerto Ricans have survived a devastating natural disaster, a dwindling economy, and a slow rebuilding process that have left many at times struggling for essential goods and services. While we work to rebuild the island, it is just as important that we address the emotional and mental damage left behind by this storm. I thank First Lady McCray and Health Commissioner Bassett for providing resources to ensure Puerto Ricans have access to critical mental health services as they work to recover from this disaster."

“Mental health services are critically needed in Puerto Rico. I thank the Mayor for his effort to provide experts from New York City to train Puerto Rican school staff in psychological first aid for students suffering from the emotional challenges following Hurricane Maria,” said **Assistant**

Speaker of the Assembly Felix W. Ortiz. “We are dealing with an island in need of so much assistance. Every effort helps.”

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