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The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I wish to thank you for your leadership in addressing the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As you are aware, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) are at the forefront to the threat as we are located close to the epicenter of this outbreak. We are thankful, however, that due in large part to our collaboration with your administration, we have not experienced a single instance of the virus in our islands for now.

I write to give you advanced notice of an impending crisis in the CNMI that is being driven by the dramatic reduction in tourism arrivals following the COVID-19 outbreak. While we are working to mitigate the consequences of this near-total collapse of our only industry, I feel it is necessary to provide you with all the information we have available to us at this present moment.

In 2019, your administration showcased phenomenal commitment to the CNMI through participation in the Covenant Section 902 Consultations. These talks pertained to the termination of the use of discretionary parole authority to authorize tourists from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to enter the CNMI for up to 45 days. During these discussions, the CNMI projected that with the elimination of the discretionary parole authority, the CNMI would result in the substantial decline in overall tourism arrivals and place the CNMI government in a precarious situation as we will have fewer government revenue to support critical public safety functions.

What was anticipated to occur in that scenario has now become reality, albeit through the forces outside of our control. While the cause of this current fiscal crisis is different, the repercussions remain pressing and the same.

You should also be aware that the loss of the Chinese tourism market was subsequently followed by the near-complete reduction of flights from South Korea as the fear of the virus spreads throughout the region. In total, the loss of the two largest markets in the CNMI's sole industry should be considered as the unequivocal and complete collapse of the foundations of our private sector in the islands. With the collapse of the drivers of private industry, government revenue and the services of government will soon struggle to remain operational.

The vulnerability of our community should be clear. Due to a tumultuous past several decades of development and federal regulation, our economy has evolved to the current position of fragility.

Regardless of the causes of this lack of diversity, the clear fact is that the economy, and the government's ability to maintain public services, are deeply in trouble.

We are now anticipating a total government budget falling as low as \$90 million. If the CNMI were to add its mandatory obligations to bond holders, the federally-administered pension fund, and the public school system, the CNMI government is potentially left with less than \$20 million to run a government for a population of 53,000 people. To add perspective, the recently amended budget for Fiscal Year 2020 provided the Executive Branch alone \$36 million.

The limited funding remaining from this contraction in the economy must pay for police officers and vehicles, the local matching share of the Medicaid and CHIP programs, support the needs of our hospital, maintain our Judiciary and Legislature, pay utilities of government facilities, and protect the wellbeing of our community and our environment. This is simply not enough.

We are working toward steps to address this dire situation. The CNMI is working toward consolidating departments, reviewing government workforce needs, shifting government policy, and sheltering as much as possible the critical services of government needed for the safety of our population.

I cannot stress the existential concerns that have arisen as a result of the present outbreak to the CNMI. Due to tourism being our sole remaining industry, there is no community in the United States more effected by this global crisis than the CNMI.

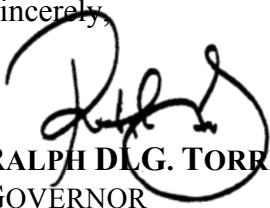
I ask for your understanding of the present circumstances and your openness to continue discussing the manifold ramifications that will arise in the coming months as we work through these trying times.

What would be most beneficial as this situation evolves, is the designation of a member of your staff that the CNMI can communicate consistently with in navigating the path ahead.

I will do all I can to ensure the CNMI does not fail in our efforts to be productive members of the American community. However, in this circumstance, the data does not present cause for much optimism.

Thank you for your time and consideration of continual conversation on this matter of great importance to me and our community.

Sincerely,



RALPH DLG. TORRES
GOVERNOR