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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

September 18, 2017

The Honorable Maureen Ohlhausen
Acting Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Acting Chairman Ohlhausen:

In light of the damage wrought by hurricanes Harvey and Irma on Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and other parts of the Gulf Coast, we write today to urge the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to remain vigilant in its efforts to protect American consumers from frauds and scams that may arise in the aftermath of these storms.

In recent days, we have witnessed the national outpouring of support and aid to the victims of hurricanes Harvey and Irma and have seen once again that natural disasters bring out the best in Americans. Congress also recently devoted billions of dollars to assist in rebuilding efforts and is likely to provide more in the future. Unfortunately, major natural disasters also present an opportunity for fraudsters and scam artists to prey on the compassion and goodwill of fellow citizens as well as hurricane victims when they are at their most vulnerable.

The Senate Commerce Committee has recently held multiple hearings on the subject of fraud and scams in the United States. These hearings emphasized that, every year, thousands of American consumers lose money to disaster and contractor fraud, such as bid-rigging, inflating repair costs, and requiring upfront payment for services and then failing to perform agreed-upon repairs. In some cases, contractor fraud schemes can involve deliberate property damage to make repairs even more costly.

The Committee also urges you to raise awareness of these types of fraud, as well as charity fraud schemes and identity theft, that frequently occur in the aftermath of natural disasters. Where appropriate, the FTC should coordinate with state and local law enforcement to enforce against illegal trade practices in the affected areas.

The Honorable Maureen Ohlhausen

September 18, 2017

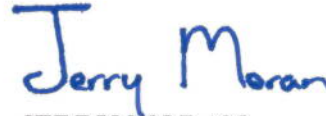
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It is particularly important that the FTC pay close attention to the victims of Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma to ensure protection against unfair and deceptive practices as they recover from these powerful storms.

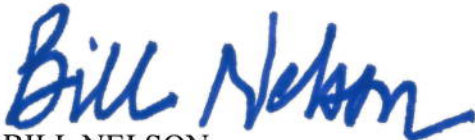
Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
Chairman
Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation



JERRY MORAN
Chairman
Subcommittee on Consumer
Protection, Product Safety,
Insurance, and Data Security



BILL NELSON
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Consumer
Protection, Product Safety,
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