



**UNITED WAY OF  
LEBANON COUNTY**

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December 5, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **UNITED WAY OF LEBANON COUNTY AND CITY OF LEBANON HOLD COMMUNITY FORUM TO ASSIST LOCALLY RESETTLED VICTIMS OF HURRICANE MARIA**

CONTACT:

Sherry Capello, Mayor  
City of Lebanon  
717-288-4401 | [scapello@lebanonpa.org](mailto:scapello@lebanonpa.org)

Kenny Montijo, CEO  
United Way of Lebanon County  
717-273-8144 | [kmontijo@unitedwaylebc.org](mailto:kmontijo@unitedwaylebc.org)

LEBANON, PA – A community forum to discuss the increasing number of displaced Puerto Rican families and individuals resettling in Lebanon County after the devastation of Hurricane Maria was held at HACC Lebanon Campus today.

Lebanon City's Office of the Mayor and United Way collaborated on the event to increase awareness, develop strategies for increasing collaboration among schools, government, employers and non-profit services, and meet the needs of those affected by the hurricane.

The forum attended by more than 60 community leaders and representatives was facilitated by Mayor Sherry Capello and United Way CEO Kenny Montijo. Speakers included Hope Roaten of the American Red Cross of Central Pennsylvania. Hope spent six weeks in Puerto Rico assisting with food distribution and disaster assessments. She described the magnitude of the crisis on the island, and the immense gratitude of the people she met.

Reverend Alicia Julia-Stanley shared a story of a resettled family she knows in our community, and some of the struggles they have faced.

Lebanon School District Superintendent, Dr. Arthur Arbom, presented the community with statistics on the number of families that have enrolled their children in school and barriers they face in accessing necessities such as warm winter clothing and coats, access to health care and counseling services. Dr. Arbom reported that the school district is enrolling an average of 10 new students per day in recent weeks with over 200 students having arrived at the school district since Hurricane Maria landed on the island of Puerto Rico. "Lebanon County shouldn't anticipate families arriving from Puerto Rico, they are already here and are going to continue to come," he said.

Because the Lebanon community already has a high population of Puerto Ricans, the area is seeing an influx of people coming from Puerto Rico in search of new starts. With this growth, the district is seeing larger class sizes (up to 28 in the elementary schools), and a significant portion of the new students do not speak English. The English Language Learner program in the district is stretched beyond capacity, with a 69:1 student to teacher ratio in one school.

Mayor Capello and Kenny Montijo facilitated a discussion in which individuals from various agencies and organizations offered to work together to align resources and reduce barriers to care. The large turnout and the many suggestions offered made it clear that the community is ready to assist. United Way and the City will be working together to facilitate continued conversation, seeking to centralize and streamline a process for individuals resettling here in the wake of this crisis.

Hurricane Maria, which made landfall in Puerto Rico on September 20, was the strongest storm the island had seen in 85 years. It left devastation in its wake, and yet today a large portion of the island is without power and clean water. If you would like to assist in the effort, please contact the United Way or the Mayor's Office.

Individuals and families who have recently relocated to the area from Puerto Rico are encouraged to reach out to the 2-1-1 human services hotline by dialing "2-1-1" from any phone. Bilingual support is available 24/7 and will assist families connect with services in Lebanon County

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