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CHICAGO VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS RETURN FROM RECOVERY MISSION

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced the return of 23 members of the Chicago Fire Department (CFD) who traveled to Puerto Rico to help with the recovery effort in wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria. CFD Chiefs Don Hroma and Tim Sampey will greet the volunteering heroes at O'Hare Airport today to thank them for their work.

"Thank you to all the Chicago heroes who have dedicated their time and talent to support our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico," said Mayor Emanuel. "The Chicago Fire Department has always reflected the best of the City of Chicago. Chicago firefighters exhibit heroism in the face of danger and offer hope in trying times. Chicagoans, and our friends and family in Puerto Rico, are united in gratitude for your service and inspired by your selfless actions."

On October 4, volunteering members of the Chicago Fire Department including firefighters, paramedics, EMTs and engineers, along with Alderman Ariel Reboyras, flew to Puerto Rico to support relief efforts. They brought defibrillators, stretchers, communications equipment, flash lights and other supplies. The delegation spent 10 days on the island and provided an on-the-ground assessment of additional resources needed, delivering food and water to remote areas of the island. They also rescued and provided basic medical attention, and cleared trees and other debris that obstructed roadways.

"We thank our members for donating their time to make a positive impact," said CFD Commissioner Jose Santiago. "The information they bring back will help us determine how we can further assist."

Earlier this month, Mayor Emanuel and Congressman Luis Gutierrez met to discuss the continued relief efforts. The Mayor and the Congressman coordinated with United Airlines to deliver much needed food, water, clothes and other supplies from Chicago to the island, and welcomed evacuees as they arrived at O'Hare. To date, hundreds of Puerto Rican residents have traveled to Chicago on United Airlines and have been provided with assistance and/or connected with family who live in the area.

In addition, the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) kicked off a series of meetings at its facility, convening 47 agencies, including local and US elected officials, City

departments and sister agencies, non-profit, as well as faith-based and private sector partners to focus on establishing a plan to receive, provide resources, and potentially house evacuees from Puerto Rico in the event programs were activated at the Federal level.

The Chicago Department of Aviation led an operation to receive evacuees on these humanitarian flights. A reception area was set up in conjunction with additional city agencies, the Red Cross and The Salvation Army to address immediate needs (i.e., mental health services, personal items, and hydration items). Once in Chicago, United Airlines provided the residents services including a one night hotel stay if needed and connecting travel to alternate destinations.

The OEMC continues coordinating with the Chicago Fire Department, the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA), Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Chicago Department of Public Health, Department of Family and Support Services and Animal Care and Control, as well as the Red Cross and Salvation Army to help those affected by disasters in Texas, the US Virgin Islands, St. Maarten, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Since September, CDA has helped process 2,300 passengers and 11 total humanitarian flights in response to the natural disasters.

Puerto Rico has been declared a national disaster and Chicagoans with impacted family members are encouraged to have them register for FEMA assistance immediately by going online to www.DisasterAssistance.gov.

To donate or search for volunteer opportunities, a verified list of organizations and charities can be found at: www.cityofchicago.org/DisasterRelief.

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