



**Statement from Ms. Hannah Bell, MLA for District 11, Charlottetown-Belvedere, and
Official Opposition Critic for Social Development and Housing on the Emergency Response to
Hurricane Dorian**

It has been heartwarming to see Islanders come together to support one another during the post-Dorian cleanup. Many Islanders find themselves in tough situations with losses and damage to property, lack or loss of important necessities such as power, communications, and food. Despite this, we see Islanders come together to help their neighbours recover and rebuild. I am proud of our Island and the people who call it home. Thank you.

I also appreciate the tireless efforts taken by EMO, first responders, and the countless utility workers putting in long days and nights to ensure everyone is being cared for and are safe. Your efforts are helping tremendously as Islanders seek to recover. Thank you.

However, I am discouraged by the response of government to this disaster. It begs the question, does government fully comprehend the challenges Islanders are facing as they try to rebuild their homes and communities? While I appreciate government donating \$50K to the food bank, our food banks already demonstrated a chronic shortage for necessities prior to the hurricane. What Islanders really need is meaningful help and assistance beyond the replenishment of an already dangerously depleted community foodbank. Islanders need help rebuilding their homes, clearing their property, accessing power and vital communications links.

The federal government provides a Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements¹ for provinces and territories dealing with natural disasters. Has the provincial government even applied for this? For example, this fund would provide Islanders with the necessary resources to restore, replace or repair their homes and belongings. Comments made by the Premier in a story by CBC this morning² seem to indicate the government is unaware of this fund.

In today's changing climate reality, we will see more events similar to this. Will government expect Islanders to simply pick up the tab for unplanned natural disasters? Isn't it the responsibility of government to plan, prepare and respond to these events, immediately and with positive effect? Again, I refer to this morning's CBC story where the Premier suggests it isn't the government's responsibility to act or lead, but to only receive direction. I cannot begin to express adequately how disconcerting it is to hear our government make such a statement.

¹ Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (n.d.), Retrieved from <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/mrgnc-mngmnt/rcvr-dsstrs/dsstr-fnncl-ssstnc-rrngmnts/index-en.aspx>.

² Yarr, K. (2019, September 13). *More government help coming for Dorian damage, says P.E.I. premier*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-government-aid-dorian-premier-dennis-king-1.5282165>.

This recent natural disaster has revealed deficiencies in government's preparedness to respond to a disaster. It also highlighted a need for an improved response for the next time we experience a similar event.

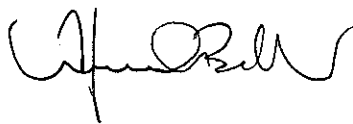
One of the deficiencies identified was a poor communications strategy to deal with the loss of traditional technologies. For example, during Hurricane Dorian the cellular network and landlines were compromised, in some areas for days. This led to difficulties for first responders such as the Alberton Fire Department to actively and effectively coordinate its response to this disaster. Will government develop a strategy for mitigating such a loss again? Will telecommunications providers be required to improve and safeguard their links to ensure service isn't lost like this again?

Another challenge has been how long the power utility companies have taken to return power to Islanders. We have heard that a lot of trees have fallen across power lines and that some areas hit are remote and difficult to reach. Will government require utility companies to proactively remove potential risks to power lines and keep transmission corridors open and accessible so they can be inspected and repaired quickly?

Then there is the loss of food due to prolonged power outages. Does government have a plan to help low-income Islanders restock their freezers and replace perishable food they lost?

These questions highlight a need for government to provide a dedicated emergency disaster relief fund which Islanders can access immediately when needed. Government should not expect Islanders to bear the brunt of a disaster when it is within the means of government to plan and prepare for such an inevitability. Especially when evidence that these types of weather events are increasing in severity worldwide. I call on government to create an emergency disaster fund fully accessible to Islanders that provides them the means to quickly recover from a disaster. I also ask that government begin the process of exploring programs and services to help Islanders proactively prepare their homes and property for the next disaster.

It is imperative for government to begin showing meaningful and effective leadership for Islanders. My colleagues and I are available to collaborate with government to develop and introduce important measures leading to the safeguarding of Islanders, their homes, families and communities.



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