THE TORRES MARTINEZ DESERT CAHUILLA INDIANS
P.O. Box 1160 Thermal, CA 92274
(760) 397-0300 – FAX (760) 397-8146

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Senator Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Support for S.2283, to Amend the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act for Comprehensive and Consistent National Disaster Emergency Management including Tribal Governments

Dear Senator Boxer,

I write on behalf of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians to ask that you support S. 2283. The Senate bill amends the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to provide a federally-recognized Indian tribe authority to submit direct requests to the President of the United States for a federal disaster declaration. Currently, tribal governments must navigate this process through the governor of their respective state.

Respectfully, this process binds a tribal government's ability to act swiftly during emergencies and is not consistent with the government-to-government trust relationship between the United States and Indian Country.

The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians are a federally recognized tribe of Cahuilla and Chemehuevi Indians. The Torres Martinez Indian reservation is a federal reservation in Imperial and Riverside Counties in California, with a total land area of 24,024 acres. Historic sites on the Reservation include Toro Indian Village, the Coachella Valley Fish Traps, and the Martinez Historic District, which has what are believed to be the oldest Indian Agency buildings in California. The Torres Martinez Historical District consists of three buildings believed to be the oldest standing Indian Agency buildings in California and was placed on the National Registry of Historical Places in 1973 and is a California Point of Historical Interest. The old Bureau of Indian Affairs Schoolhouse, which still stands today, was built in 1907 and served as part of the center of Tribal activities. The Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians were established by Executive Order on May 15, 1876. The uniqueness of our climate, geography and topography and the jurisdictional duplicity as the result of our reservation lands straddling two counties, makes the need for amendment to the Stafford

Act even more important as it will provide for a more direct government-to-government dialogue in the event of a disaster.

S.2283 will provide tribal governments equal access to the public safety decision-making power when requesting a federal emergency disaster declaration. The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian tribe has been working with FEMA, the National Congress of American Indians, to develop this bill which will provide tribal equal access to much-needed public safety decision-making power when catastrophic disasters impact tribal communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration in strengthening tribal self- governance and protecting all citizens of this country, and for support for passage of S.2283.

Sincerely,

Mary L. Resvaloso
Tribal Chairwoman