

TOOLKIT

TAKE!

ACTION!

FOR PUERTO RICO!

WHAT'S INSIDE THE TOOLKIT 2022



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Welcome to *Take Action 4 Puerto Rico!* 2022

Our annual *Take Action for Puerto Rico!* campaign kicks-off as we reach the five-year mark of Hurricane Maria on September 20th and will continue until significant parity, respect, and a just recovery for Puerto Rico is achieved. The *Take Action for Puerto Rico!* Toolkit has the information and resources you need to be an effective agent of change for Puerto Rico.

Five years ago, we could not have imagined the devastation and marginalization that our beloved Puerto Rico would endure. Hurricanes in the Caribbean are nothing new, but Hurricane Maria's ferocity—super-powered by the realities of climate change—exposed the vulnerability of an island with a decaying energy infrastructure, a weak social safety-net, an unfair relationship with the United States, and a profound financial crisis.

Support for fair treatment of Puerto Rico has grown over the past five years as more people have learned about and come to understand the impact of the inequities faced by the island at the hands of the federal government, and the role that years of systemic inequities played in creating a vulnerable Puerto Rico.

Through hard work and advocacy with partners such as yourself, we've been able to make significant progress toward achieving some of our shared goals. In the last five years, we've been able to get unfair restrictions on disaster spending lifted, achieve parity for anti-poverty measures like the Child Tax Credit (CTC), higher funding for the island's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and increase in the federal share of the Medicaid program. There is much more that needs to be done to build on these successes - including ending all systemic disparities in federal funding and unfair federal treatment of Puerto Rico.

Take Action for Puerto Rico! continues to bring together people and organizations to raise awareness, stimulate collaboration, and take action around critical issues for Puerto Rico five years after Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the island. These critical issues include:

- a just and sustainable recovery,
- equity and an end to discrimination by the federal government, and
- a return democratic self-governance for Puerto Rico

Here's how you can help - choose the areas that speak to you, about which you are the most passionate, and deliver the message that Puerto Rico deserves better:

Puerto Rico Deserves a Just and Sustainable Recovery:

- **Investing federal dollars to save lives:** The widespread destruction of the energy grid has created an opportunity to rebuild Puerto Rico in a more durable, resilient, and decentralized way based on renewable energy sources prioritizing rooftop solar energy. Federal funds to rebuild Puerto Rico's energy grid must only be used to meet the island's renewable energy mandates, not used to invest in continued reliance on polluting fossil fuels. The *Take Action for Puerto Rico!* Toolkit provides policy recommendations for Congress and the Biden Administration to ensure this happens.
- **Ensure transparency and community participation in recovery:** The *Take Action for Puerto Rico!* Toolkit provides useful background information about how - and why - Congress and the President must ensure all federal disaster recovery and infrastructure investment funds are effectively used by requiring transparency and civil society input in decision-making processes for the sustainable recovery of Puerto Rico. You will also find an overview of legislative and executive actions important to moving Puerto Rico forward.

Puerto Ricans Deserve Equitable Treatment and an End to Discrimination by the Federal Government:

- **Puerto Ricans deserve to be treated the same as U.S. citizens living in the States.** Puerto Rico receives far less funding for federal health care programs than other U.S. jurisdictions. Specifically, the federal share for Medicaid is artificially capped at a much lower rate than states, and Puerto Rican Medicare patients are excluded from the low-income prescription drug subsidy for seniors. Puerto Rico faces a catastrophic drop in federal Medicaid funding this year when a temporary [federal funding boost is set to expire](#).
- People living in Puerto Rico are excluded from receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits (SSI), which is available to low-income elderly, disabled, and blind Americans in all 50 states, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and the District of Columbia due to years of discrimination based in large part on centuries-old racist Supreme Court precedents called the Insular Cases.
- Despite high rates of food insecurity, federal nutrition aid is also artificially capped for Puerto Rico, because the island is excluded from the SNAP, or Food Stamp program. In 2020, the First Circuit in Boston ruled in the [case of Vaello-Madero](#) that it was unconstitutional to discriminate against residents of Puerto Rico by denying SSI benefits. In 2021, the Biden administration decided not to withdraw the government appeal submitted by the Trump administration. As a result, the appeals court decision was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, and legal discrimination continues in areas such as nutritional assistance for low income families, and the denial of SSI and other benefits.
- The Take Action for Puerto Rico! Toolkit points to specific legislation and executive action your Member of Congress and the President should take in order to end the denial of equitable federal funding for critical anti-poverty programs in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico Deserves Democratic Self-Governance:

- **Terminate the role of the FOMB:** Puerto Rico has been ruled by an unelected, federally appointed, Fiscal Control Board (or FOMB) since 2016 that is the ultimate authority on all fiscal and financial decisions in the island. The board has broad powers, even the authority to annul laws duly approved by Puerto Rico's elected officials. Repealing the undemocratic FOMB, auditing its decision making for accountability, and providing for a smooth transition, would help return Puerto Rico to democratic self-governance by its elected representatives.
- **Economic Redevelopment:** Puerto Rico is under historic financial distress, which has severely hampered the island's ability to restart its own economy. The debt cannot be prioritized or come before basic needs such as housing, energy, healthcare, lifesaving infrastructure, and education.
- The *Take Action for Puerto Rico!* Toolkit explains why helping the island and its already impoverished people with economic tools, full equity in federal programs and other measures should take precedence over debt repayments and argues that Puerto Rico should be allowed to discharge any illegal or unconstitutional debt. The toolkit also provides information on legislation and executive action that can provide the tools for Puerto Rico to develop its economy in a more sustainable and self-reliant way.
- The TA4PR! Advocacy Toolkit provides more information on how to amplify your groups' message to reach wider audiences.

We are so grateful for your participation! **Take Action for Puerto Rico!** campaign is deeply invested in your efforts and success and is here to assist you with any request or information that you need for successful participation in this national campaign.

For more information or questions regarding **Take Action for Puerto Rico!** please contact info@takeaction4pr.org.

We Are All Puerto Rico

While most organizations are aware of the crisis in Puerto Rico, many may not be up-to-date on the current situation and needs on the island. Groups, like yours, are natural allies that can share information with your constituencies and members and expand political support for the over 3 million U.S. citizens living on the island through your extensive and powerful networks.

The speed at which civil society groups were able to react and assist Puerto Rico, in some cases within days and weeks ahead of FEMA and other government disaster response agencies, spell out the crucial role you have played and the difference you can still make in Puerto Rico's recovery. That role is no less important when it comes to advocating for the long-term policy changes needed for Puerto Rico to have a sustainable future.

Here are a few examples of how the current situation in Puerto Rico aligns with your organizational mission and interests, ideas about organizations that you can connect with, and how to explain why your members and communities should be interested in Puerto Rico's cause.

HOW DOES PUERTO RICO FIT INTO YOUR MISSION?

Climate and Environmental Justice Groups

The devastation of the hurricanes in Puerto Rico and the severe climate changes elsewhere are impacting the natural environment and creating a whole new population of climate refugees within the United States and across the world. Over [200,000 fled](#) the island with most heading to U.S. states (some temporarily) after Hurricane Maria hit in September 2017.

- Puerto Rico has a historic opportunity to lead the way in developing a resilient energy grid that is sustainable and helps the U.S. meet its climate goals and to seek equitable solutions to decades of environmental harm to low-income communities. In fact, Puerto Rico has its [own aggressive climate goals](#) that should be encouraged and supported to come to fruition. The [largest grant](#) in FEMA history has been awarded to Puerto Rico for rebuilding the energy grid; climate and EJ groups must ensure this money and this historic opportunity is used to build a future based on renewable energy and is not squandered by recreating unsustainable and polluting energy reliance on fossil fuels.
- Hurricanes Irma and Maria severely impacted local drinking water and the surrounding environment. In the aftermath of the disaster, people [resorted to drinking](#) potentially contaminated water from those sites.
- Flooding and loss of coastal habitat pose major [conservation concerns](#) on the island.
- Puerto Rico faces some unique challenges when it comes to toxic hazards [as a large portion of the waste on the island comes](#) from its once-booming pharmaceutical industry.

- Some of the energy production methods in Puerto Rico are also [causing toxic and environmental hazards](#) – not only to the island but to the states as well. For example, the company AES operates a coal plant that [dumped coal ash](#) on the island until protesters and activists succeeded in banning it in 2017. Afterward, AES tried to unload toxic ash in [St. Cloud, FL](#) but was [stopped](#) by community members. [The ashes were then sent to South Georgia.](#)
- Environmental groups should also be concerned about the [fast-tracking mechanism](#), which allows the unelected Fiscal Board to designate certain infrastructure projects they deem “critical” to be able to avoid complying with certain environmental regulations. This sets a dangerous precedent for future policies that could apply to cities, counties, and other jurisdictions across the continental U.S.
- The [toxic legacy of U.S. Navy bombing](#) and other military practice exercises in the island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra have left generations of Puerto Ricans with a legacy of [disease](#) and environmental contamination for which the U.S. government has a moral responsibility. The [slow cleanup](#) and [closure of medical facilities](#) following Maria create a human rights health care issue that must be urgently addressed.

Reproductive, Women's, and LGBTQ+ Rights

Reproductive, gender and LGBTQ+ rights are frequently under political attack in Puerto Rico. Civil and human rights must support the fight for equality and choice in Puerto Rico. Domestic violence has also risen to crisis proportions on the island.

- With the [overturning of Dobbs](#), some protections that Puerto Ricans once counted on have become more uncertain. Puerto Rico's legislature is currently considering anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-choice bills. For example:
 - 5 anti-choice [bills](#) have recently been debated (On June 21, 2022, the Puerto Rico Senate [passed](#) SB 693 to limit a woman's right to choose).
 - A bill to ban conversion therapy, which is considered by the U.N. to be a form of torture, [was blocked](#) by a Senate committee in May 2022.
 - [Protests](#) demanding action to address gender violence and femicide led to a [declaration of a state of emergency](#) in 2021.

Groups that Care About Nutrition, Housing, Health, and Children

Many groups across the United States that care about a range of human needs, have also joined in the fight to ensure that the residents of Puerto Rico have access to adequate nutrition, affordable housing, and comprehensive healthcare.

- Inspired by Jewish values and ideals, [Mazon](#), a Jewish Response to Hunger, has taken on nutritional inequity in Puerto Rico, consistently sharing detailed policy information with its members and [advocating](#) for increased nutrition funding for the island. For an explainer about food insecurity and inequities in Puerto Rico, watch [Mazon's Insider Briefing Series — Addressing Food Insecurity in Puerto Rico](#) (May 12, 2022).
- The [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) (NLIHC) has also been a steadfast ally of Puerto Rico through its work with the [National Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition](#) which focuses on ensuring that the federal government prioritizes the housing needs of low-income survivors. Their work with Puerto Rico includes convening a working group on disaster housing issues in Puerto Rico, working closely with local housing legal and community advocates; [expressing their concern](#) with FEMA's Individual Assistance on the island, and [calling on Congress](#) to ensure that Puerto Rican people have the power to determine and direct their own recovery, and [hosting panels](#) to discuss the impact Hurricane Maria had on children. They have also shed light on the reasons FEMA [application denials](#) were so high.
- [The Coalition on Human Needs](#) has been advocating for Puerto Rican children affected by Hurricane Maria by shedding light [on the problems they are facing](#), providing updates on the matter, and elevating the issue in front of stakeholders.

Social Justice and Civil Rights Groups

Those who fight for justice and against discrimination need to educate themselves about the structural inequities, now playing out in ongoing reconstruction and rebuilding efforts, in order to advocate on behalf of communities impacted by Maria, and ensure the same concern is shown for all affected by disasters, no matter their skin tone, language, geographic location or economic status.

- Numerous [studies](#) concluded that the federal government's response to Hurricane Maria and Irma was [slower](#) and less generous than in other U.S. jurisdictions affected by disasters.
- President Trump [openly complained](#) about providing aid to Puerto Rico, going so far as suggesting trading Puerto Rico for [Greenland](#). He was widely criticized for his [discriminatory remarks](#) and [disparate treatment](#) of U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico.
- Social justice and civil rights groups care about the equitable treatment of marginalized groups. Due to Puerto Rico's unique status with the United States, Puerto Ricans on the island are discriminated against and are denied full federal anti-poverty programs. This is thanks to a series of racist Supreme Court cases called the [Insular Cases](#).

Organized Labor

Organized labor was [a driving force](#) in the immediate recovery in Puerto Rico. Besides being on the front lines of delivering supplies, and rebuilding infrastructure they have been working with their Puerto Rican members on the mainland and in Puerto Rico [to demand a just economic recovery](#). Labor can use its influence with elected officials/decision makers by working in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico to prevent undermining of labor laws and support efforts to rebuild and protect U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico.

- The [PROMESA](#) federal law, passed by Congress, set a dangerous precedent in Puerto Rico for undermining labor organizing and was opposed by many unions. It allows the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) and the Governor of Puerto Rico to [lower the minimum wage to \\$4.25 an hour](#) for workers younger than 26 years of age. It also empowers a "revitalization coordinator" to designate "critical infrastructure" projects that can be approved on a fast track basis, and thus avoid compliance with several environmental, labor, and other regulations. The FOMB has continually pushed for undercutting labor rights, recently threatening to [annul a law](#) partially restoring those rights. The board's push for the LUMA Energy privatization scheme also led to the end of the UTIER electrical workers union.

- Many labor organizations have Puerto Rican members who are active within their leadership and many members acted as a lifeline right after Hurricane Maria. Besides providing basic emergency supplies, volunteers from SEIU, National Nurses United, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), among others, were key in life-saving relief efforts in Puerto Rico days after Maria. Many like AFT and the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), have continued their commitment to assist in rebuilding and advocating for policy changes.
- Organized labor has a special understanding that injustice towards one group or class of people is a threat to all people. Their experience in organizing and deployment of resources is the perfect partnership to help Puerto Rico as it moves toward its recovery and economic growth.
- Organized labor groups are engaged in civic participation and organizing with

Latino Groups

- Puerto Ricans are the second largest Latino group in our nation at approximately 6 million. They have been engaged, at the forefront of fighting for the rights, well-being, and empowerment of Latinos and others all across our nation. In New York City, Puerto Ricans are seen as pioneers who paved the way for other Latino groups to enjoy rights they would not be able to exercise were it not for the struggles the Puerto Rican community waged for decades. [LatinoJustice PRLDEF](#), for example, started as a Puerto Rican-focused organization and is now among the most prominent national Latino legal defense funds fighting for immigrant rights, as well as the rights of Hurricane Maria evacuees and others.
- Efforts to divide DREAMers from Puerto Ricans in Congressional legislation that forced Members of Congress to choose between hurricane relief for Puerto Rico and other affected jurisdictions and avoiding the termination of DACA show how Latinos need to unite and not allow others to divide them. These efforts to divide us were rejected by the Puerto Rican members of Congress, and the overwhelming majority of Hispanic Congressional members.

African-American Groups

From Hurricanes Katrina to Irma and Maria, systemic racism and discrimination in disaster response have resulted in needless deaths and slow economic recoveries in historically marginalized communities like New Orleans and Puerto Rico.

- Puerto Rican culture is strongly influenced by its Afro-Latino roots. In fact, Puerto Ricans' views on race have been shifting. The 2020 Census reflected an [80% drop](#) in the number of Puerto Ricans who identified as white.
- Most of the population has African ancestry, often mixed with indigenous Taíno and/or European heritage. Puerto Ricans come in all shapes, sizes, and colors.
- Discriminatory treatment of Puerto Ricans, and its outcomes, is similar to that experienced by other communities of color in the U.S. who have faced [systemic inequalities](#) - rooted in racism - in areas like [housing](#), [healthcare](#), and the [environment](#).
- [Arturo Alfonso Schomburg](#), who was Puerto Rican of African and German descent, was a writer, historian, activist, and cultural promoter. Schomburg was born in Puerto Rico and moved to New York City where he founded several organizations focused on fighting for the civil rights of Puerto Ricans and African Americans. His work contributed to founding the [Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture](#).

Teacher's Groups

In spite of protests from parents, teachers, and local communities, Puerto Rico has closed 673 schools since 2007, [presenting serious harm to the students and communities who rely on them, while failing to deliver the financial savings used to justify their closure](#). Many others simply never reopened after the hurricanes.

- Tens of thousands of students and teachers have been displaced. Teachers in Puerto Rico are chronically underpaid. This combination of circumstances has caused an [exodus](#) that has also aggravated educational conditions for students in public schools. Thanks to President Biden's pandemic relief money, teachers on the island received a [pay raise](#) for the first time in ten years. The pay bump amounts to \$1,000 a month or a 30% increase for the average teacher in Puerto Rico.

- [The American Federation of Teachers](#) (AFT) and the *Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico* (AMPR) were active in recovery efforts following Hurricane Maria hit. Schools served as vital points for shelter, distribution of supplies, and centers of recovery in the weeks after Hurricane Maria. AFT and AMPR, in partnership with Hispanic Federation and various non-profits, [raised more than \\$2 million to purchase water filters](#) that were delivered to schools and communities in need of clean water.
- AMPR teachers were [cleaning and repairing schools across Puerto Rico](#) before even FEMA had landed in their cities. With supplies sent from mainland unions and charities, teachers were cleaning classrooms and getting lunchrooms ready to give kids sanctuary to recover and learn.

Faith-Based Organizations

[Faith-based institutions are often on the front lines](#) of serving populations in need of assistance. These organizations can and should use their moral authority to call on Members of Congress and others, to be responsive to the needs of Puerto Ricans during times of tremendous hardship and tragedy. They can use their platforms to ensure Puerto Rico's people are not forgotten, such as through newsletters, sign-on letters, sermons, etc.

- [Jubilee USA](#) – a coalition of religious, development, and advocacy groups – has been at the forefront in the [fight for global debt relief](#) for poor countries, budget relief, and the auditing of the debt in Puerto Rico. Similar to Jubilee USA, other faith-based groups believe that their religious values demand that they fight inequality in order to defend the most vulnerable.
- Even if the need for emergency supplies has passed, the process of rebuilding remains a long-term proposition. Many faith-based institutions have Puerto Rican parishioners with leadership/membership on the mainland who care and are ready and willing to assist the Puerto Rican community on the island from their own parish.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW EXAMPLES OF WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUR MEMBERSHIP:

- Create opportunities to educate your members about the issues being faced in Puerto Rico and show how they align with your group's priorities (invite a speaker from *TakeAction4PR* campaign at info@TakeActionPR.org).
- Share information about how your membership can help using organizational newsletters or social media.
- Share literature/handouts at organizational meetings.
- Have your organization's leadership and members reach out to their Members of Congress and ask them to assist Puerto Rico. (include one or more of the "asks" we include in the [2022 Policy Asks section of this toolkit](#)).
- Ask them to join in a Congressional Call-In Day, or distribute a petition tailored to your issue (see *Legislation Your Member of Congress Should Support* [here](#)).
- Ask members to author or co-author an op-ed to educate the public and demonstrate there is broad support for Puerto Rico.



Take Action 4 Puerto Rico!

Principles for a Just Recovery and Resilient Future for Puerto Rico

A just recovery must be in the hands of the people of Puerto Rico, led by the people, and for the people of Puerto Rico.

PROTECT HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

Rebuilding should not be an excuse for exploitation or for waiving any civil, human, or environmental rights in the name of speed – or greed.

REBUILD A STRONGER, SUSTAINABLE PUERTO RICO

A sustainable and just recovery must focus on long-term solutions. Recovery efforts must meet the needs of the present communities without compromising future generations by taking a holistic approach, achieving a balance between economic, social, and environmental development, and be led by the communities who know their needs best.

REBUILD SMARTER: USE DISASTER FUNDING TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR A RENEWABLE ENERGY GRID

Everything possible should be done to help the island prevent loss of life and significant economic interruption from the ongoing energy crises and prioritize meeting its goal of 100% renewable energy by 2050.

PROVIDE PARITY IN FEDERAL BENEFITS THAT CREATE ACCESS TO BASIC HEALTH and NUTRITION

To ensure the health and dignity of people in Puerto Rico, it is essential that Congress finally eliminates federal health care and nutrition funding disparities. The only way Puerto Rico can build a sustainable future is by ending nearly 125 years of systemic discrimination by the federal government against Puerto Rico and its residents.

PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT THE MOST VULNERABLE PUERTO RICANS

Geographic location should not be a determinant of access to, or denial of, federal programs that support the most vulnerable U.S. citizens such as low income disabled, blind, and elderly persons.

BUILD STRONG LOCAL ECONOMIES

Investing in local economies should come first. Federal funding should have a multiplier effect by prioritizing contracting and investment in local businesses and non-profit organizations to strengthen local economies and communities. That includes investments in local workforce development and hiring, including within emerging sectors (e.g. renewable energy, infrastructure, and agriculture).

EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT REQUIRES TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Radical transparency is a prerequisite to ensure federal dollars effectively reach impacted communities, and achieve the goals intended by federal funders. Democratization of the recovery and rebuilding process is the best way to minimize corruption, fraud, and waste. Good governance requires that federal and local contracts not be awarded to companies that have been convicted or fined for breaking any labor, environmental, or other federal or local laws.

RETURN TO SELF-GOVERNANCE

In a democracy, policy decisions that impact people's lives should be made by elected representatives. A return to democratic self-governance requires that ultimate authority on all fiscal and financial decisions on the island must be returned to its elected representatives. Congress must terminate PROMESA, eliminate the unelected Financial Oversight Management Board (FOMB), and assume accountability for the outcome by requiring a transparent, independent review of its actions, and ensure a responsible transition to local control.

SELF DETERMINATION

All people have the right to freely choose their sovereignty and international political status with no interference. The President and Congress must work with representatives of the several status options in Puerto Rico to develop and fund a federally-binding, democratic, self-determination process that includes effective education to voters about each option to move the island towards decolonization and guarantees the will of the people is respected and implemented.

STRENGTHEN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Rebuilding the island's agriculture sector and promoting resilient and sustainable local food production is essential for communities in Puerto Rico. Access to safe, potable water is a human right. Low-income children and families in Puerto Rico deserve access to the same levels of nutrition support as other families in the U.S.

PREVENT FORCED DISPLACEMENT AS A BYPRODUCT OF "RECOVERY"

People should be allowed to elect to stay, choose where to relocate, and have a say in decisions that impact rebuilding their communities. The recovery and rebuilding process should prioritize mitigation before displacement. All communities should receive equitable and just access to resources and treatment, regardless of income, property value, location, or other qualifiers.

PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO PROSPER VIA ACCESS TO QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION

Children and youth in Puerto Rico have the right to a quality public education that will ensure equal access to personal, professional, and labor opportunities. Access to quality public education is a key element in achieving an effective recovery, lowering poverty levels, and overcoming the long-term economic crises of the island.

DEBT RELIEF SHOULD NOT COME BEFORE PEOPLE

A just recovery is not possible when those in power prioritize paying creditors instead of investing in the recovery and the future of Puerto Rico. Repaying an unaudited debt should not be a higher priority than the rebuilding and recovery of the island's physical and human infrastructure. Though most of the debt restructuring has been agreed to, other bankruptcy-like agreements remain outstanding. Providing for the basic needs of people, especially the most vulnerable after years of repeated crises should be the highest priority.

INDEPENDENT AUDIT

The future of Puerto Rico must not be compromised by repaying debt that was illegally or unconstitutionally obligated. There must be an independent audit performed and certified by non-governmental experts. Any debt found to be illegal or unconstitutional must be discharged. No funds provided for disaster recovery should be used to repay creditors, directly or indirectly, or used to make economic projections for debt repayment.

SUPPORT PUERTO RICANS DISPLACED BY ECONOMIC AND NATURAL DISASTER

Puerto Ricans who continue to leave the island to the states because of ineffective emergency relief, a slow recovery, and ongoing economic, energy, and health crises must not be forgotten. They are disaster victims and need ongoing support from national and local governments, and from philanthropic sources, to ensure a successful transition to the U.S. or promote a safe return to the island.

FACILITATE RETURN TO THE ISLAND

Displaced people should have the right to return to their homes and communities. To recover long-term, Puerto Rico needs to retain and rebuild its social capital. The federal government should work with Puerto Rico's government and community leadership to develop economic and social support plans that promote the return of Puerto Ricans displaced by ongoing crises, and other diaspora Puerto Ricans to strengthen the island's social capital.

"MARSHALL" PLAN

Effective rebuilding requires the federal government to take a holistic approach, systematically investing federal dollars to rebuild, revitalize, and revive Puerto Rico's health care system, economy, housing, public social services, and infrastructure, including its energy grid, utilities, and telecommunications system.

Take Action for Puerto Rico!

Talking Points [2022]

Puerto Rico must be treated equitably in all policy agendas that demonstrate responsibility for the conditions that exist today and to change them.

On the five-year mark of Hurricane Maria's devastating landfall in Puerto Rico, there is still much work to do to help Puerto Rico rebuild and to ensure a sustainable future that saves lives. We need your help to advance a shared vision for a stronger, more equitable, and resilient Puerto Rico. Anyone can refer to these talking points when preparing for a meeting or a call with elected officials, when drafting your own op-ed or press release, or when speaking to the media.

Our message is simple: the federal government has a moral and legal responsibility to help the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico recover from this tragedy just as it would help any other group of American citizens.

“ Without additional action at the federal level, it could take as long as a generation, or more, for Puerto Rico to rebuild its infrastructure and its economy. ”

IT'S TIME TO END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RESIDENTS OF PUERTO RICO IN FEDERAL SAFETY-NET PROGRAMS

To ensure the health and dignity of people in Puerto Rico, it is essential that Congress finally eliminates discriminatory funding disparities in federal health care, nutrition, and other programs to support vulnerable, low-income people.

- The federal government must stop discriminating against Puerto Rico, not just in disaster relief, but in all federal programs. The only way Puerto Rico can build a sustainable future is by ending the systemic discrimination by the federal government against Puerto Rico and its residents.
- 'The federal safety net is flimsier and more porous in Puerto Rico than in the rest of the nation. To be blunt, the federal government discriminates against Americans who live in Puerto Rico' (according to U.S. Federal Judge, William G. Young).

- Congress must stop this discrimination based on geographic location and pass legislation for Puerto Rico to participate fully in Medicaid, SNAP (food stamps), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), among others.
- President Biden and Congress must stop the federal government's treatment of Puerto Ricans as second-class citizens.
- People who live in Puerto Rico deserve the same level of healthcare funding in programs like Medicaid and Medicare, that other U.S. citizens receive.
- This [unconstitutional treatment](#) and discrimination in federal programs, especially those intended to provide a safety net for vulnerable people is one of the main causes of Puerto Rico's current economic crisis and is partly responsible for the island's high poverty levels.
- Geographic location should not be a determinant of access to, or denial of, federal programs that support the most vulnerable U.S. citizens such as low-income disabled, blind, and elderly persons.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST STOP RELYING ON RACIST PRECEDENTS TO DEFEND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PUERTO RICO

The [Insular Cases](#) represent a shameful legacy our nation should leave in the past. The prejudice in these cases is so abhorrent that even Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch said in a recent federal benefits decision, that overturning the "[shameful](#)" Insular Cases was long overdue.

- Racist court decisions, collectively called the “Insular Cases” described Puerto Ricans and residents of Guam and other territories as “half-civilized,” “savage” and “alien races” and should not be used by our federal government to justify treating Puerto Ricans as second-class citizens.
- The Biden Administration and previous administrations’ reliance on the racist Supreme Court precedents known as the Insular Cases, geographic versions of Plessy v. Ferguson, to justify discrimination is unconscionable.
- To achieve the goals intended by federal funders, and ensure federal dollars effectively reach impacted communities, requires meaningful public participation with robust stakeholder engagement during all phases of decision-making processes.
- The promotion of resilient and sustainable local food production, access to safe, potable water, and bolstering the island’s agriculture sector are essential for Puerto Rican communities to recover.

PUERTO RICO PAYS MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF TAXES

Those who say Puerto Rico should not be treated fairly because they don’t pay federal income taxes are ignoring the facts.

- Residents of Puerto Rico in fact, do pay many federal taxes. In 2019 alone, the federal government [collected](#) \$3,528,739,000 in taxes from Puerto Rico residents.
- Poor people generally do not pay income tax regardless of where they live, and this is not a requirement to qualify for federal safety-net programs like food stamps, SSI, or Medicaid.
- Puerto Rico residents [paid more](#) in federal taxes than six states including Vermont, Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Alaska, and all other U.S. territories combined. Yet low-income people living in those states don’t get denied access to federal programs.

PUERTO RICO DESERVES A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE WITH INVESTMENTS MADE IN SOUND, LIFE-SAVING INFRASTRUCTURE

A sustainable and just recovery must focus on long-term solutions. Puerto Ricans have shown their ability to come together and fill gaps in the failure of the federal government’s response. The billions of federal dollars in reconstruction funding should heed and ensure those voices are incorporated and respected.

- Recovery efforts must meet the needs of the present communities without compromising future generations by taking a holistic approach, achieving a balance between economic, social, and environmental development, and be led by the communities who know their needs best.
- In order for the recovery process to be sustainable and just, it must be community-driven and forward-thinking. The residents of the island have a better understanding of how to ease recovery and set up the island for success.

- Rebuilding should not be an excuse for exploitation or for waiving any civil, human, or environmental rights in the name of speed – or greed.

PUERTO RICO NEEDS A GREEN AND RELIABLE ENERGY GRID BASED ON RENEWABLES

Everything possible should be done to help the island meet its goal of 100% renewable energy by 2050 and prevent loss of life and significant economic interruption from the ongoing energy crises.

- Federal funds to rebuild Puerto Rico’s energy grid must prioritize investments intended to meet Puerto Rico’s renewable energy goals - and not be used to invest in continued reliance on polluting fossil fuels.
- Creating a resilient, decentralized energy system in Puerto Rico is not just about climate – it is literally a matter of life and death.
- Congress should use its oversight authority to ensure that the largest grant in FEMA history (\$12 billion+), to rebuild Puerto Rico’s energy grid complies with the island’s renewable energy mandate (100% renewable by 2050), instead of extending the life of a broken and fossilized energy system.
- Numerous studies have shown the benefits of rooftop solar with storage to create resiliency, lower costs for low and moderate-income (LMI) consumers and will ultimately save lives.
- This is the time for Puerto Rico to transform its outdated, centralized, fossil fuels dependent energy system, into a future-proof, bottom-up, resilient grid, fully based on renewable energy, primarily solar, and energy storage.
- Coal ash and natural gas facilities in Puerto Rico should not get a free pass from regulators. These private polluters should not get public funding that generates dirty air and water consumed by Puerto Ricans.

RADICAL TRANSPARENCY IS A PREREQUISITE TO ENSURE FEDERAL DOLLARS EFFECTIVELY REACH IMPACTED COMMUNITIES, AND ACHIEVE THE GOALS INTENDED BY FEDERAL FUNDERS.

- Congress and the President must ensure all federal disaster recovery and infrastructure investment funds are effectively used by requiring transparency and civil society input in decision-making processes for the sustainable recovery of Puerto Rico.
- Democratization of the recovery and rebuilding process is the best way to minimize corruption, fraud, and waste.
- Good governance requires that federal and local contracts not be awarded to companies that have been convicted or fined for breaking any labor, environmental, or other federal or local laws.
- These [radical transparency measures](#) are a democratic check on both local and federal actors.

ALL PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO FREELY CHOOSE THEIR SOVEREIGNTY AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL STATUS WITH NO INTERFERENCE.

- The President and Congress must work with representatives of the several status options in Puerto Rico to develop and fund a federally-binding, democratic, self-determination process that includes effective education to voters about each option to move the island towards decolonization and guarantees the will of the people is respected and implemented.
- President Biden must keep his promise to work with representatives of the several status options in Puerto Rico to develop and fund a federally-binding, democratic, [self-determination process](#) that guarantees the will of the people is implemented and includes viable options to move the island towards decolonization.
- President Biden needs to keep his campaign promise to return internal democratic self-governance to Puerto Rico and support legislation to terminate PROMESA.
- The President should take executive action to keep his campaign promises and hold the undemocratic Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) accountable by auditing the debt, reviewing the FOMB's austerity measures, and further reducing unsustainable/illegal debt.

DEBT RELIEF SHOULD NOT COME BEFORE PEOPLE

A just recovery is not possible if paying bondholders is a higher priority than investing in the recovery and the future of Puerto Rico. The debt cannot come [before basic needs and essential services](#).

- The debt must be independently audited and certified. The future of Puerto Rico must not be compromised by repaying debt that was illegally or unconstitutionally obligated.
- Repaying an unaudited debt should not be a higher priority than the rebuilding and recovery of the island's physical and human infrastructure.
- The Biden administration must keep its promise to conduct an audit of Puerto Rico's debt and roll back austerity measures taken by the undemocratic Board. An independent audit of Puerto Rico's [billions of dollars of debt will](#) enable the island to plan for a fair and sustainable fiscal path forward.
- Though most of the debt restructuring has been agreed to, other bankruptcy-like agreements remain outstanding and should cut further debt.

TA4PR! CAMPAIGN

- **Take Action 4 Puerto Rico!** is composed of grassroots advocates, faith-based leaders, labor unions, community-based organizations, public officials, and educators. Our goal is to educate, encourage, and elevate the discussion and, ultimately, take action around the many critical issues for Puerto Rico's recovery. Five years later, those issues include radical transparency and community engagement, congressional oversight to ensure funding is used for its intended purpose and reaching those most in need, ending discrimination in funding for federal programs like SSI, Medicaid, and SNAP, rebuilding a resilient energy grid that prioritizes a transition to renewables, climate change preparedness, and economic redevelopment.
- **Take Action for Puerto Rico!** was launched before the one-year mark of Hurricane Maria on September 20th, 2018, and continues all year long, with focused activity each year from September 20th through October 20th, coinciding largely with Hispanic Heritage Month.

Puerto Rico History 101

Why is Understanding Puerto Rico's History Important?

Before Hurricane Maria struck the island 5 years ago, people in the United States mostly thought of Puerto Rico as a sunny vacation spot with beautiful beaches (if they thought of it at all). Puerto Rico has a rich and fraught history. Without understanding some historical context of the island archipelago's relationship with the U.S., it is impossible to fully grasp the current situation.

We hope you enjoy learning about Puerto Rico, its history, and its people!

Earliest Inhabitants

- The earliest inhabitants of modern-day Puerto Rico were ancestors of an [indigenous Caribbean people called Arawaks](#), who came from modern-day Venezuela. They settled in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and are known as "[Taínos](#)" (which means "noble" in the Arawak language). They named the island "[Boriken](#)" and the people became known as Boricuas (boh-REE-kuh-wahs).

Spanish Colonization

- [Columbus arrived at Boriken in 1493](#), and "claimed" the island for Spain, beginning four hundred years of colonization which included slavery, disease, and death for many of the original Taíno population. To this day, Puerto Ricans' first language is Spanish and Catholicism remains the dominant religion attesting to the enduring influence of Spanish colonialism.
- [Spain's efforts to exploit Puerto Rico's natural resources](#) and turn the island into a production center for crops like sugar and coffee resulted in the enslavement and depletion of its Taíno population, the adoption of a slave trade using people brought in from West Africa (present-day Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Dahomey), and the arrival of new infectious diseases such as smallpox.
- [In 1897, Puerto Rico finally became an autonomous](#) part of Spain through the approval of the [Carta Autonómica](#), a charter that provided for broad autonomy for the island, while still keeping the "[capitán general](#)," as the last figure of authority representing the crown.

U.S. Bombing and Takeover

- U.S. policymakers began expressing an interest in Puerto Rico at the end of the 18th century. In 1783, future U.S. President John Adams asserted that both Cuba and Puerto Rico were an 'integral part' of the U.S. trade in the Caribbean. His son, John Quincy Adams, later the 6th President of the U.S., stated in 1823 that the two islands were "[natural appendages to the North American continent](#)."

- During the Spanish-American war in 1898, at almost the same moment in history that Puerto Rico achieved its broadest autonomy after 400 years of European colonization, the U.S. bombed and [invaded](#) San Juan. In a bid to get Puerto Ricans to fight on the side of the U.S., a manifesto was issued promising to protect Puerto Ricans. Spain lost the war, and [Puerto Rico was "ceded" as a territory to the U.S. as part of the Treaty of Paris](#). A U.S. military-led government ruled the island for two years.
- In 1900, Congress passed the [Foraker Act](#) to establish the legal framework for a civilian government in "Porto Rico" [sic] under U.S. governance and taxation.
- **After less than two years of hard-won autonomous governance and 400 years of colonization under Spain, the U.S. ignored the new, democratically-elected local legislature of Puerto Rico in favor of creating its own colonial system.**

“ In the Insular Cases, “The Supreme Court argued that Puerto Rico and other territories “ceded” by the Spanish were full of “alien races” who couldn’t understand “Anglo-Saxon principles,” and therefore the full measure of the constitution did not apply to them. ”

Discrimination Against Puerto Rico Enshrined in U.S. Law

Insular Cases

- During the U.S. continental expansion period, 31 territories applied for and were admitted as states. However, in 1900, the Foraker Act, bolstered by a series of [racist U.S. Supreme Court cases](#), later dubbed the “[Insular Cases](#),” - decided by largely the same court that decided *separate was equal* in *Plessy v Ferguson* - determined that, unlike prior territories, Puerto Rico (along with other newly conquered territories) were “[unincorporated](#)” U.S. territories.
- According to the court, this meant that inhabitants of these territories were not on a path to becoming U.S. states, stating that Puerto Rico was “[foreign in a domestic sense](#)” and that the island “belonged to but was not a part of” the United States leaving Puerto Ricans in limbo with ambiguous legal status and without U.S. passports for decades. *Plessy* was eventually overturned, but the Insular Cases, which are built on the same racist worldview, still stand today.
- It is this history of legal discrimination, that continues to justify inequitable and “[cruel](#)” treatment of U.S. citizens in federal and other benefits based solely upon where they live. In 2022, the 120 years of legal jurisprudence granting [Congress the ability to decide](#) whether to treat citizens living in Puerto Rico equitably was evident again as the Supreme Court ruled *U.S. v. Vaello Madero* that Congress has the ability to discriminate against U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico in spite of numerous lower court [decisions](#) finding this behavior unconstitutional. Several [advocacy organizations](#) have repeatedly [expressed their frustration](#) with the federal government’s persistence in opposing equal treatment for people who live in Puerto Rico.
- Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the lone dissenter on the Supreme Court in the *Vaello Madero* decision wrote, that “*Congress’ decision to deny to the U. S. citizens of Puerto Rico a social safety net that it provides to almost all other U. S. citizens is especially cruel given those citizens’ dire need for aid.*”

Puerto Ricans and Discrimination in Federal Anti-Poverty Programs

- U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico receive unequal treatment when it comes to funding for federal healthcare programs, such as Medicaid. The island receives a block grant that is capped and unlike the federal Medicaid funding to the states, the amount is unrelated to need or population. For example, in Mississippi, the poorest state, [the federal government pays 75.65% of the costs](#); yet in Puerto Rico, [it pays for 55%](#). Puerto Rico received a temporary increase under the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare) but that money fell short by 2017 (year 7), and Congress has been making short-term extensions ever since. Puerto Rico faces its next “[Medicaid Funding Cliff](#)” in December of 2022.
- **If Congress does not provide additional healthcare funding for the island’s poorest residents, close to 1 million patients could lose their insurance or suffer significant reductions in benefits on the heels of an ongoing global health pandemic.**
- Among other things, the funding structure means that Puerto Rico [can’t afford to cover seven of Medicaid’s 17 “mandatory” services](#), including nursing home care and nurse practitioner services or receive the [Medicare subsidy](#) for prescription drugs (LIS). They are also not eligible for long-term care provided to low-income seniors on the mainland. To make the limited federal grant dollars cover as many people as possible, only the poorest of Puerto Rico residents qualify for Medicaid.
- Residents of Puerto Rico are also not treated equitably in federal anti-poverty programs like [SNAP](#) (food stamps), [SSI](#) for the blind, disabled, and elderly, the [Child Tax Credit](#) (until 2021, only available to Puerto Rican families with at least three children), among others.

Jones Act

- The [Merchant Marine Act of 1920](#) - also known as the “Jones Act” - regulates maritime commerce in U.S. waters and between U.S. ports and deals with [cabotage](#) (transport of goods or passengers between two places in the same country).
- This 97 year old [protectionist law](#) intended to protect American shipbuilding raises the costs of imported U.S. goods for the people in Puerto Rico by over a billion dollars a year. It requires that all goods transported by water between U.S. ports be carried on ships that have been constructed in the United States, fly the U.S. flag, are owned by U.S. citizens, and are crewed by U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents.

- This raises the cost of living in Puerto Rico, makes Puerto Rico an unattractive place to produce goods bound for the U.S. mainland, and has the effect of putting Puerto Rico at a competitive disadvantage to other Caribbean islands. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, which are exempt from the law, [U.S.-made goods are about half as expensive](#).
- Under the Jones Act, foreign-originating goods must be dropped off in Jacksonville and then shipped to Puerto Rico via an exorbitantly expensive Jones-compliant vessel. The cost of shipping a standard-size container from New York to Puerto Rico has been much higher than shipping it to Jamaica.
- Food in Puerto Rico [costs twice as much](#) as it does in Florida. The Jones Act does not apply exclusively to Puerto Rico, and also makes goods shipped to states like Alaska and Hawaii more expensive. Efforts to exempt Puerto Rico from the law, even in times of crisis, have been short lived.
- **Puerto Rican Independence Party/Partido Independista Puertorriqueño (PIP) - founded in October 1946** - believes that Puerto Rico should become an independent republic and grew from an average of 3% to 11.5% in the 2020 election for Governor. .
- **Popular Democratic Party/ Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) - founded in July 1938** - believes in continuing to develop the current status of Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth. The PDP went from 38% to 31.5% of the 2020 gubernatorial vote.
- Following the popular [movement](#) in 2019 to rid Puerto Rico of Governor Ricardo "Ricky" Rosselló, two new political parties gained strength and won seats in Puerto Rico's legislature:
 - **The Citizen's Victory Movement (Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana)** party stands for progressivism, anti-corruption efforts, promoting social, economic, and fiscal reconstruction, and decolonizing Puerto Rico. In the 2020 general election, the MVC won 13.95% of the vote, 2 out of 27 Senate seats, and 2 out of 51 House of Representatives seats.
 - **Movement for Dignity (Proyecto Dignidad)** is a conservative party promoting the inclusion of religious-based beliefs in policy. In the 2020 election, *Proyecto Dignidad* received 8% of the vote for governor and two legislators were elected in each chamber. These legislators have built coalitions to push for a bill to limit access to abortion and to [thwart a bill](#) that would have outlawed anti-LGBTQ "conversion therapy" (classified as torture by the American Psychological Association).

Political Parties in Puerto Rico

- Historically, party affiliation in Puerto Rico is not related to political ideology. It is not unusual to find people from all over the political spectrum on social and economic issues in the same party. While Democrats and Republicans are organized around shared policy views that can be placed in the Conservative-Liberal ideology spectrum, parties in Puerto Rico are organized mainly around shared views on what the island's political relationship (the so-called "status" issue) should be with the United States.
- *Some recent examples:*
 - In 2020, the candidates of the New Progressive Party (NPP) for Governor and Resident Commissioner (non-voting member of Congress) were a Democrat (Pedro Pierluisi) and a Republican (Jenniffer González), respectively.
 - From 2012-2016, the Governor and the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico were Democrats, however, they were members of different parties in Puerto Rico. Gov. Alejandro García Padilla was a member of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) while Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi was a member of the New Progressive Party (NPP).

Current Parties

- **New Progressive Party/Partido Nuevo Progresista (NPP)** - founded in 1967 - believes that Puerto Rico should become a U.S. state. The last two elected governors were members of the NPP (the most recent governor won election with 33% of the vote).

U.S. Citizens

- In 1917, Congress passed the [Jones-Shafroth Act](#) which granted U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans. The Jones Act separated the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative branches of Puerto Rican government, provided limited civil rights to the individual, and created a locally elected bicameral legislature. This happened just [a month](#) before the U.S. declared war on the German Empire on April 6, 1917. This sparked a debate - that is still ongoing - about the intentions of the U.S. Government offering citizenship to Puerto Ricans. Two months after granting citizenship to Puerto Ricans, President Wilson [signed a compulsory service act](#) that applied to Puerto Ricans allowing Puerto Ricans to be drafted into the U.S. military. It has also been argued that the federal government believed that white people weren't suited to fight in tropical climates because they didn't have "immunity" to tropical diseases. Instead, the U.S. conveniently [sent](#) so-called Puerto Rican "immunes" to defend the Panama Canal.

- Although Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens requiring them to fight for U.S. interests, citizenship did not give them the [right to vote](#) for president or to elect voting senators or representatives to Congress if they lived in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican Participation in the U.S. Military

- In 2019, there were approximately [330,000 veterans and some 35,000 Puerto Ricans](#) in active duty service both in Puerto Rico and on the mainland. The Puerto Rico Army/ Air National Guard and the Reserve components represent another 10,000 Puerto Ricans in uniform. Altogether, at least 375,000 Puerto Ricans are veterans or are still wearing the uniform – almost [80,000 veterans](#) live on the island where they are not eligible for all of the [same programs](#) as veterans received by those living on the mainland, like [TRICARE](#).
- [Nine Puerto Ricans have been awarded the Medal of Honor](#), seven have been awarded the Navy Cross, and [eighteen have been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross](#).
- During the Korean War, Puerto Ricans in the 65th Infantry Division, known as the Borinqueneers, obtained [at least 10 Distinguished Service Cross awards, 256 Silver Stars, 596 Bronze Stars, and a Congressional Gold Medal for the entire regiment](#).

Puerto Ricans and Limited Sovereignty

- For the first 50 years under U.S. rule, (1898 to 1946), Puerto Rico was ruled by non-Puerto Rican Governors appointed by the U.S. President. During that time, laws passed by the Puerto Rican legislature could be vetoed by the U.S. President.
- In 1946, President Truman appointed the [first Puerto Rican Governor](#), Jesús T. Piñero. In 1948, Congress passed the [Elective Governor Act](#), and the first democratically elected Governor, [Luis Muñoz Marín](#), assumed office in 1948.
- In 1948, Law 53, prohibited owning or displaying a Puerto Rican flag anywhere, even in one's own home. It also became a crime to speak against the U.S. government or to speak in favor of Puerto Rican independence. Anyone accused and found guilty of disobeying the law could be sentenced to ten years imprisonment, a fine of \$10,000 (U.S.), or both. After many years of nationalist revolts, many of them [armed and coordinated](#), the "[Gag Law](#)," signed into law by U.S. appointed governor of Puerto Rico [Jesús T. Piñero](#), was finally repealed in 1957.

- In 1952, [Puerto Rico officially became a U.S. Commonwealth](#), after the people of the island drafted and ratified its own Constitution, a status which granted Puerto Ricans a degree of control over local affairs, but not full self-determination. Nearly 82% of Puerto Rican voters approved the [Constitution of the Estado Libre Asociado](#). But Puerto Rican Nationalists, in favor of Independence from the U.S., considered the outcome of the vote a political farce since the referendum offered no option to vote in favor of independence or statehood, restricting the choices to ratifying or rejecting the new commonwealth status.
- During the next period under U.S. sovereignty, Puerto Rico's economy shifted, from agriculture to manufacturing. Investment by industries during the '60s and '70s transformed the economy of Puerto Rico in dramatic and positive ways. From being called the "[Poorhouse of the Caribbean](#)" in the 1940s when per capita income was only \$121, by the 1960s, income per capita had risen to more than \$3,000 per person per year. This idea of generalized "betterment" in Puerto Rico's quality of life as a result of wide scale manufacturing which simultaneously reduced Puerto Rico's food independence, is showcased in the government-produced film called "[Progress Island: USA](#)."
- In 1976, Congress changed the U.S. tax code ([Section 936](#)), to attract U.S. investors and corporations to operate in Puerto Rico by allowing them to avoid paying federal taxes. This made investors very wealthy, but it also helped create higher paying jobs and an economic base for Puerto Rico during the time the law was in place. It is undeniable these measures produced wealth and [economic growth](#) within Puerto Rico.
- In 1996, Congress began a ten-year phase-out of [Section 936](#), which awarded generous tax credits and federal tax exemptions to U.S. manufacturing companies that operated in Puerto Rico and the territories.
- 2006 saw the completion of the phase-out, the loss of more than 100,000 jobs, and the beginning of a long-lasting recession. The economic loss reduced the Commonwealth's revenues requiring [the government to borrow excessively](#) to pay for basic services. A [vicious cycle](#) of borrowing to pay off old debt resulted in a total \$70 billion public debt and close to \$50 billion in unfunded [pension liabilities](#).

Puerto Rico's Debt - The Passage of **PROMESA** and the Imposition of an Undemocratic Fiscal Board

- When the 936 [phase-out was complete](#), the groundwork was laid for the financial crisis that would later take hold, as the Puerto Rican economy suffered and the government began a cycle of unsustainable borrowing to pay for government services. This led to the debt crisis and subsequent default.
- Predatory Wall Street lending aggravated the island's debt issues. According to a [Front-line PBS report](#), Wall Street firms engaged in irresponsible lending practices and pushed the government to borrow unsustainably, which further increased the island's debt liabilities.
- Puerto Rico does not have the [same access](#) to bankruptcy laws that U.S. cities and states have. In 2016, Puerto Rico was approaching a financial crisis with the inability to service or restructure its debt. Rather than allowing Puerto Rico to restructure its debt under the bankruptcy process, Congress passed a bill known as **PROMESA**, or the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act. This law created a Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), appointed by the United States President, with legal authority to exercise control over Puerto Rico's fiscal affairs and restructure the island's \$70 billion debt.
- The undemocratic nature of the FOMB coupled with the powers granted to it by Congress over a wide range of Puerto Rico's economic and other affairs underscores the unfairness of Puerto Rico's colonial status under U.S. sovereignty.
- PROMESA is deeply [controversial](#) because while it allows Puerto Rico access to a [court-supervised](#) bankruptcy-like debt restructuring process, the law also curtails Puerto Rico's self-governance and internal democratic processes because Congress gave the FOMB final authority over budgets and fiscal decisions.
- The FOMB has practically absolute powers over Puerto Rico's budget - including the spending of all disaster funds and budgets related to the provision of basic services. It has required the Puerto Rican government to [implement austerity measures](#) such as [severely cutting pensions](#), [closing public schools](#), attempting to implement a [work requirement](#) for food stamp recipients, eliminating and [undermining labor rights](#) and pay raises, even [against the wishes of the elected officials](#) of the island's Government.
- PROMESA also awarded the FOMB and the Governor the power to [reduce the federal minimum wage](#) in Puerto Rico to \$4.25 for workers who are younger than 26 years old.

- Since PROMESA was signed into law, the FOMB has agreed to [debt restructuring](#) often over [the objections of the Puerto Rican government](#) that prioritized the payment of bondholders over the needs of the Puerto Rican people. These restructuring agreements have severely impacted the [quality of life and services](#) by imposing austerity measures on the island's fiscal plan.
- PROMESA also awarded the FOMB and the Governor the power to [reduce the federal minimum wage](#) in Puerto Rico to \$4.25 for workers who are younger than 26 years old.
- In addition to imposing austerity, contracted advisors of the FOMB, specifically McKinsey & Co, have been [revealed](#) to have clients that are in business agreements with the Puerto Rican government creating a serious conflict of interest.

Puerto Rican Migration

- The latest 2020 U.S. Census showed Puerto Rico's population fell [11.8 percent to 3.3 million](#) over the past decade.
- The first great migratory wave of Puerto Ricans to the mainland began in the mid-'40s and lasted for more than a decade, during which [more than 600,000 Puerto Ricans moved to the mainland](#).
- Puerto Rico is currently in the midst of another migratory wave, with [500,000 leaving the island between 2006 and 2016](#), and [more than 135,000 leaving in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria](#).
- According to the Center for Population Studies, 210,000 Puerto Ricans lived in Orlando by 2014. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, an additional [100,000 Puerto Ricans moved there](#).

Democracy in Action

- The people of Puerto Rico have a proud history of taking to the streets to make their voices heard about political and social issues. These protests have been viewed worldwide as an example of democracy in action and are praised for their [creativity](#) and infectious energy.
- Puerto Ricans [danced](#), [meme'd](#), [rapped](#), and found every way possible to get the message across. This historic moment of unity demonstrated in the summer of 2019 crossed political, demographic, and socioeconomic lines in a way not seen before in Puerto Rico since the successful movement to stop the U.S. Navy from continuing to use the Puerto Rican island of [Vieques](#) for military target practice, after leaving a legacy of 60 years of contamination, disease, and abuse.

Summer of '19

- During the summer of 2019, [a series of events led to massive protests by the people of Puerto Rico](#) that resulted in the [resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló](#).
- The protests were ignited [after the arrest by the FBI of two cabinet members](#) under corruption charges and the publication of a group chat in which Governor Rosselló and other top government officials made [cruel, racist, homophobic, and misogynistic comments](#) about various people.
- The two weeks after the publication of the group chat saw the [build-up of protests](#) – both on the island and all across the world – calling for the resignation of Governor Rosselló. The movement was coined #RickyRenuncia and it [quickly became a trending topic on all social media platforms](#), while also capturing [the attention of the media](#).
- On July 22nd, close to a million Puerto Ricans, or 1 out of every 3 island residents, took to the streets of Puerto Rico to demand the governor's resignation.

Summer of '22

- Puerto Rico has persevered through many challenges in the last few years, ranging from bankruptcy to natural and man-made disasters, including mismanagement of the island's still unrepaired electricity grid.
- The new private U.S.-Canadian consortium LUMA Energy [has been operating](#) the transmission and distribution lines for the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority since the summer of 2021, having undergone an 11 month transition prior to that.
- Constant blackouts and [unreliable service](#) have disrupted daily lives, economic activity, and the ability to [provide health care](#) has gotten worse, not better, according to [data released](#) by the independent Puerto Rico Energy Bureau (Negociado de Energía in Spanish).
- Public outrage coupled with [disrespectful remarks](#) to reporters in a botched press conference held only in English have come to a boiling point with [new protests](#) against the Governor and the company reminding Puerto Ricans of the last summer when boricuas' dissatisfaction led to a historic mass movement for change in the Summer of 2019.

Puerto Rico Fast Facts!

DID YOU KNOW?

CULTURE AND GEOGRAPHY

- Founded in 1521, San Juan Puerto Rico is the [oldest city](#) under U.S. jurisdiction.
- Puerto Rico is home to El Yunque, the only tropical rainforest that is part of the U.S. Forest Service. (Source: [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#))
- Puerto Rico is about the size of the state of Connecticut and has 272 miles of beautiful coastline, and [300 beaches](#). (Source: [USA Today](#))
- Puerto Ricans often use the word “boricua” [Bo-REE-ku-wah] as a self-description. The name comes from the indigenous Taíno word Boriken, which was the native population’s name for the island. (Source: [Welcome.toPuertoRico.org](#))
- In 2019, the New York Times named Puerto Rico the [No. 1 Place to Visit](#).
- Puerto Rico’s beaches have been perennially featured as some of the best in the [Caribbean](#), the United States, and the [world](#). Here’s a [video](#) showing some of the things you can discover in Puerto Rico.

“ **Is the best restaurant in the U.S. in Puerto Rico? The BBC thinks so.** ”

- The first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, and the first Hispanic U.S. Surgeon General, Antonia Coello Novello, are both Puerto Rican. (Sources: [Washington Post](#), [Encyclopedia Britannica](#))
- Puerto Rico has competed individually in the Olympics since 1948 and has won nine medals including a gold medal for tennis and another recent gold for track and field. (Source: [International Olympic Committee](#))
- In 1971, Roberto Clemente of the Pittsburgh Pirates became the first Hispanic to reach 3,000 hits, and the first Puerto Rican and Latin American to be enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

- The Puerto Rico Trench is the deepest submarine depression in the North Atlantic Ocean. It is about 1,090 miles (1,750 km) long and 60 miles (100 km) wide. The deepest point in the Atlantic Ocean, the “[Milwaukee Depth](#),” lies within the Puerto Rico Trench. (Source: [National Geographic](#))
- Puerto Ricans have served in the U.S. military since 1899 and have been soldiers in every major American military engagement since then. As of 2017, the Veterans Affairs Department listed the number of veterans living in Puerto Rico at 79,322. (Source: [U.S. Veterans Affairs Dept.](#))

MUSIC AND FOOD

- One of Puerto Rico’s most notable exports is its music, which is widely acclaimed and played all over the world. Salsa is the most recognized Puerto Rican musical genre. However, Bomba and Plena (musical forms rooted in African and Taíno sounds and traditions) are considered by Puerto Ricans to be the most popular form of folk music on the island.
- Today, Reggaeton (a musical genre influenced by hip hop and Caribbean music) might be arguably the most popular dance music coming out of Puerto Rico, [with Bad Bunny as its most recognizable standard bearer](#). In 2022, for two straight years, Bad Bunny became the most streamed artist on [Spotify](#) and has broken world records for [concert attendance](#) and downloaded songs. He also recently became the first [non-English](#) artist to win the Video Music Award for artist of the year.
- Acclaimed Puerto Rican performer Rita Moreno is the only Latina, and only one of four women out of a total of twelve artists, to be an EGOT winner after receiving all four major annual American entertainment awards: an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and a Tony. (Source: [Billboard](#))
- Ricky Martin, Benicio del Toro, Marc Anthony, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Daddy Yankee, Ozuna, Bad Bunny, and Jennifer López are among the group of celebrities that are household names in the U.S.
- Jose Feliciano’s ‘[Feliz Navidad](#)’ is considered a Christmas staple both in Puerto Rico and in the U.S.

- Puerto Rico has a rich culinary scene influenced by a variety of cultures. Mofongo (fried green plantains with garlic and pork cracklings) is widely considered to be Puerto Rico’s most popular dish -- a meal with strong roots in Western Africa, and Spanish and Taíno ingredients. (Source: [Washington Post](#))
- Puerto Rico imports nearly [85% of its food](#), a situation made worse by the [Jones Act](#). Puerto Rico is [heavily dependent](#) on imported goods to meet local food and beverage demand. (In 2019, food and beverage imports from the U.S. [totaled over \\$6.5 billion](#), surpassed in imports only by Mexico and Canada in most categories.)
- Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens by birth. More than 3.2 million Puerto Ricans live on the island and almost twice as many, 5.3 million live on the U.S. mainland, making eligibility to vote in federal elections dependent on where a Puerto Rican happens to live. (Sources: [Newsweek](#), [Pew Research Center](#))
- 43.4% [of the Puerto Rican Population lives under the federal poverty line](#), which is almost four times higher than the [U.S. national average of 12.8%](#).

“ The median income in Puerto Rico is \$21,058. That is less than half of the median income in the poorest U.S. state, Mississippi, which is \$46,511. ”

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

- The island’s system of government is called a Commonwealth. It is a republican form of government (3 branches) with the highest elected office being the Governor who is elected to a four-year term. This system was formed in 1952 after Puerto Rico voters approved a constitutional convention, a constitution and amendments to it requested by Congress and finally ratified by Congress and the people (Source: [Welcome.toPuertoRico.org](#)).
- There have been at least 10 Members of Congress of Puerto Rican descent and 20 [Resident Commissioners](#) elected to Congress. The first Puerto Rican elected to serve as a Member of Congress was Hernán Badillo, who represented New York from 1971 to 1977. This list includes: Charles Rangel, Robert García, José Serrano, Luis Gutiérrez, Nydia Velázquez, Raúl Labrador, Darren Soto, Ritchie Torres and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortés. (Source: [Library of Congress](#)) Resident Commissioners are non-voting members of Congress.
- In 2016, Congress passed the PROMESA federal law, which gave the island a debt restructuring mechanism not available to the states. The law also imposed an unelected Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) that has the final say over all laws, contracts, regulations, and financial and fiscal matters; even over the wishes of the island’s elected officials. This puts into question the “republican form of government” Congress approved and the people of Puerto Rico voted for in 1952.
- Puerto Rico imports 85% of its food leading to higher prices and dependency on imports. (Source: [NBC](#))
- Puerto Rico has its own tax system and revenues go to the Commonwealth and its municipalities. But Puerto Ricans also pay U.S. payroll taxes (Social Security, Medicare, etc.) on any income source they receive from the mainland, but do not receive the same level of federal benefits received by those living on the mainland. (Source: [Vox](#))

AFTER MARIA - DID YOU KNOW?

- Between 80% and 90% of houses were damaged by Hurricane Maria. (Source: [PBS](#))
- It took nearly two weeks for President Trump to visit the island. The five hours he spent there were marked by him [tossing paper towels](#), jump-shot style, into a crowd of residents as opposed to doing a substantive review of the damage or the needs of the island. In comparison, both [President Obama](#) and [President Bush](#) visited the areas affected by Hurricane Sandy and Hurricane Katrina just two days after they made landfall. (Source: [TIME](#))
- In a tweet, [Trump denied that nearly 3,000 people died](#) in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. He expressed skepticism about the death toll, suggesting that individuals who died of other causes were included in the hurricane count.
- A [devastating internal report by FEMA](#) featured in [The New York Times](#) underscores how unprepared the agency was for the hurricane response.

(For more information about the Federal Response to Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria go [here](#).)

Policy Asks - 5 Years Later How the Federal Government and Congress Can and Must Help Puerto Rico

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria - a severe category 5 hurricane - hit the island of Puerto Rico causing thousands of deaths and billions of dollars in damage. This was less than two weeks after the island was recovering from Irma, another category 5 hurricane. The entire island lost electricity in the longest blackout in U.S. history. Some communities lacked electricity for up to eleven months creating a situation that devastated the economy, resulted in thousands of deaths, and left many people homeless, jobless, without access to life-saving medical care, clean water to drink, and living under plastic sheeting. According to the Puerto Rico Department of Housing, as of May 2022, [3,646](#) homes impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria still have blue tarps as partial or whole roof. One [death toll](#) calculates the number of deaths related to the aftermath of the hurricanes to be at least 3,000, making Hurricane Maria the [deadliest](#) in modern American history.

Damage reports in aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Sept 2017:

More than 95% of Puerto Ricans lacked drinking water	100% of the power grid
28% of federally qualified health centers were damaged	95% of cellular sites
90% of households applied for assistance	43% of wastewater treatment plants were inoperable
Almost 3000 people lost their lives	more than 40,000 landslides
	more than 97% of roads were impassable

Graphic source: Rand Corporation, Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center [data](#).

Five years later, many of the conditions continue. People living in Puerto Rico are exhausted from the ongoing struggle of daily living that includes two years of a [global pandemic](#), rising energy costs, [protests](#), [political turmoil](#), ongoing [droughts](#), [flooding](#), [earthquakes](#), and [energy blackouts](#). Mental and emotional health issues are a serious concern. Critical mental health [facilities have closed](#) and mental health infrastructure is poor on the island.

“Our federal government has a moral and legal responsibility to help the people in Puerto Rico recover from these compounded crises just as it would help any other group of U.S. citizens.”

We would argue that the federal government has even greater responsibility given its role in discriminatory policies that have systemically weakened Puerto Rico's social, environmental and economic infrastructure, and through the [intentional delaying](#) of recovery efforts following Maria, compounding the suffering of its citizens living in Puerto Rico.

Five years after Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated Puerto Rico, the reconstruction of the island has barely started. Two years after Maria, [30,000](#) homes still had blue tarps instead of roofs. Five years later [3,646](#) families on this tropical island are still [officially](#) reported as living with plastic sheeting instead of a roof.

Of the approximately 27,000 applications received for rebuilding assistance by the Puerto Rico Housing Department's CDBG-DR Repair, Reconstruction or Relocation Program (R3 Program), as of August 8 2022, a total of [3,841](#) cases - or less than 14% - have been reported as repaired, reconstructed, or relocated. Additional rebuilding has been financed and accomplished much more efficiently through [private](#) and [non-profit](#) programs out of frustration with government denials and cumbersome processes. (See *TA4PR Response of the Federal Government* [here](#) for more detail.)

Roots and Legacy of Discrimination in Federal Funding

The widely criticized [Insular Cases](#), decided by the Supreme Court between 1901 and 1923, held that the "half-civilized," "savage" "alien races" living in Puerto Rico, Guam, and other U.S. territories were not entitled to the same constitutional rights

and protections afforded to other U.S. citizens because they could not understand “Anglo-Saxon principles.” Much like the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which justified “separate but equal” racial segregation, and *Korematsu v. United States*, which upheld the mass internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the Insular Cases represent a shameful legacy our nation would do well to move past. Civil and human rights advocates are [urging the federal government to abandon](#) reliance on this legal doctrine. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch said in a [recent federal benefits decision](#), *U.S. v Vaello Madero*, that was unfavorable to Puerto Rico, that overturning the “shameful” Insular Cases was long overdue. Although many in Congress [agree](#), it is not enough to end this discrimination.

The United States government has [discriminated](#) against Puerto Rico with respect to federal benefits and programs, such as [Medicaid](#), [SNAP](#) (food stamps), [SSI](#) for the blind, disabled, and elderly, the [Child Tax Credit](#) (until 2021, unavailable to Puerto Rican families with fewer than three children), among others, since it forcibly acquired the island as a “territory” in 1898. (*For a basic Puerto Rico History 101 go [here](#).*)

The lack of parity and [discrimination](#) in funding for federal benefit programs, especially those designed to alleviate poverty, have worsened the economic, social, and environmental vulnerabilities in the island.

“The irrational and discriminatory treatment by the federal government is one of the main causes of Puerto Rico’s current economic crisis and has directly contributed to the island’s high poverty levels.”

This disparate and [harmful treatment](#) was [recently affirmed](#) by the Supreme Court at the request of the Biden Administration in spite of [multiple requests](#) that President Biden withdraw the appeal of the [lower courts cases](#) finding this treatment to be discriminatory and unconstitutional.

This type of historic discrimination by the federal government towards Puerto Rico has allowed for the inequitable delivery of federal benefits - including disaster response and recovery. Systemic discrimination, compounded by [intentional neglect](#) on the part of the federal government, put Puerto Rico in a more vulnerable position that made damage even more catastrophic and resulted in a high death toll.

“The only way Puerto Rico can build a sustainable future is by ending nearly 125 years of systemic discrimination by the federal government against Puerto Rico and its residents.”

TODAY IN PUERTO RICO

Poverty

According to the most recent [Census](#) data, in 2021, [43.4% of the 3.2 million](#) people in Puerto Rico lived in poverty. For comparison, the U.S. [national poverty rate](#) was dramatically lower at 12.8%. Puerto Rico’s poverty rate has remained fairly steady since the economic crisis started in 2006.

Even more disturbing are the high rates of childhood poverty on the island. [57% of children](#) in Puerto Rico live in poverty compared to 18% of children in the U.S. Puerto Rico widely outpaces even the [poorest U.S. states](#) in this terrible measure (for example, Mississippi’s rate of poverty is 18%). In 2019, 42% of [families with children](#) were unemployed. The lack of access to full participation in the federal Child Tax Credit (until 2021 only available to families with three or more children in Puerto Rico) undoubtedly contributed to this situation. Growing up in poverty is one of the greatest threats to healthy child development. It increases the likelihood that a child will be exposed to factors that can impair their brain development and lead to poor academic, cognitive and health outcomes.

About [38.5%](#) of all seniors in Puerto Rico ages 60 and up had income below the poverty line in 2018. Low-income seniors living in Puerto Rico are denied access to Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI), a federal cash assistance program that provides monthly payments to low-income aged, blind, or disabled persons in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Northern Mariana Islands. It is estimated roughly [700,000](#) people are currently denied these benefits because they live in Puerto Rico. Two federal courts determined that denying SSI benefits to people was [unconstitutional](#). However, following appeals by both the Trump and Biden administrations, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with the federal government saying Congress had a right to continue this discrimination. Puerto Ricans came very close to ending the decades of discrimination in federal programs through this case. The decision of the Biden Administration to defend this discrimination was [deeply disappointing](#).

Cost of living

The cost of living is increasing, with energy costs having [nearly doubled](#) since 2020 and inflation disproportionately impacting high food costs, compounded by the fact that Puerto Rico imports nearly [85% of its food](#), a situation made worse by the [Jones Act](#). Puerto Rico is heavily dependent on imported goods to meet local food and beverage demand. (In 2019, food and beverage imports from the U.S. [totaled over \\$6.5 billion](#), surpassed in imports only by Mexico and Canada in most categories.) A [recent study](#) found that 40% of Puerto Rican families reported food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, because federal funding for the island’s nutritional assistance program ([NAP](#)) is limited and does not respond to actual need, eligibility and benefit levels are far under the levels of food assistance for the mainland and even other territories. That is why the TakeAction4Puerto Rico campaign and its partners have consistently [called](#) for full integration of Puerto Rico into the SNAP Program administered by USDA. (See [Legislation We Support here](#).)

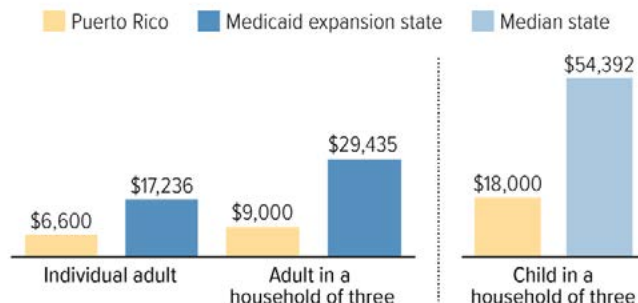
Health care

Last September, the island faced [yet another Medicaid “cliff”](#) due to inequities in [federal health care](#) funding, putting the healthcare of hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico at risk. The Biden administration was able to [successfully avoid](#) the Medicaid “cliff” in 2021 by allocating nearly \$3 billion per year in additional federal Medicaid funding. However, without additional congressional funding, the next “cliff,” or loss of funding for health services for the poor, is expected [December, 2022](#).

As a result of the [inequity in Medicaid funding](#), Puerto Rico can only provide 10 out of Medicaid’s 17 “[mandatory](#)” services for the poorest of the poor in Puerto Rico (see eligibility chart below). For example, Medicaid in Puerto Rico [does not cover](#) home health services, hospice care, medical equipment and supplies, or nursing facility services. In 2019, before the global pandemic, \$1.5 million or nearly half of the island’s residents qualified for Medicaid. That is why the TakeAction4PuertoRico campaign and its partners have consistently called for full integration of Puerto Rico into the Medicaid program so that low-income people living in Puerto Rico can receive the same minimal level of medical services as people living in the mainland U.S. (See [legislation we support here](#).)

Medicaid Eligibility Limits Much Lower in Puerto Rico Than in States

Annual income caps for program eligibility



Note: Under the Affordable Care Act, states can expand Medicaid to adults with income up to 138 percent of the poverty line. Puerto Rico expanded eligibility for adults, but at a much lower poverty level. For Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, states and Puerto Rico both cover children at higher income levels than adults. But, states cover children up to much higher income levels than Puerto Rico does.

Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

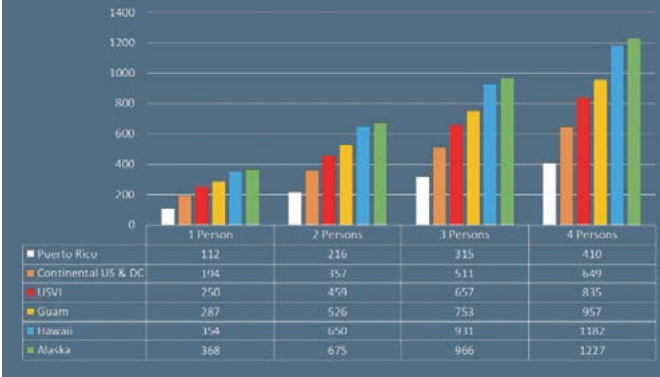
Graphic Source: [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)

Nutrition and Food Insecurity

For the past 40 years, Puerto Rico has received nutritional assistance aid through a [federally-funded block grant](#) that is capped at an annual amount. Unlike [SNAP](#), a federal entitlement in which everyone eligible for benefits under its formula receives them at the full benefit level and which has special provisions to provide food aid after a disaster, Puerto Rico’s funding is capped and not based on SNAP qualifications. This prevents the Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) from meeting the basic food needs of poor citizens living in Puerto Rico, including children, seniors, and people with disabilities. As a result of the limited federal funding, the program is available to fewer low-income households and typically [provides much smaller benefits](#).

The \$1.9 billion capped block grant under NAP limits Puerto Rico’s ability to manage changes in need, including those due to demographic shifts, poverty levels, and economic stagnation. Close to 1.5 million island residents currently receive some level of nutrition assistance aid. Most of the beneficiaries are children, elderly, and disabled individuals. The levels of aid in Puerto Rico fall well below those of many states and territories. Puerto Rican children and families continue to experience food insecurity and inequity because of their exclusion from SNAP, which is fully available to residents of the Continental United States, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the District of Columbia. These disparities require legislative action to integrate Puerto Rico into SNAP (see [chart below](#)).

PUERTO RICO NAP VS. STATES & TERRITORIES ON SNAP



Graphic Source: Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico

Lack of democratic self-governance

A just recovery is not possible when those in power [prioritize paying creditors](#) instead of investing in the recovery and the future of Puerto Rico. Repaying an [unaudited debt](#) should not be a higher priority than the rebuilding and recovery of the island's physical and human infrastructure. Though most of the debt restructuring has been agreed to, other outstanding bankruptcy-like agreements remain. Providing for the basic needs of people, especially the most vulnerable after years of repeated crises, should be the highest priority. Returning Puerto Rico to internal self-governance by repealing PROMESA, the bill that created the FOMB, should also be a top priority, along with holding the board accountable for its [austerity measures](#) and [conflicts of interest](#).

Energy Insecurity

The federal government has allocated more than \$10 billion for the optimization of the energy grid. **Puerto Rico is in a perfect position to provide the model for transforming an outdated, centralized, fossil fuels dependent energy system, into a future-proof, bottom-up, resilient grid, fully based on renewable energy**, primarily solar, and energy storage, at the distribution scale. Numerous [government](#) and [NGO](#) studies have shown the benefits of rooftop solar with storage to create resiliency, lower costs for low and moderate income (LMI) consumers, and to ultimately save lives.

Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority's (PREPA) heavy reliance on a centralized fossil fuel grid made the island vulnerable to the longest blackout in U.S. history and resulted in a [tragic loss of lives](#).

“Creating a resilient, decentralized energy system in Puerto Rico is not just about climate – it is literally a matter of life and death.”

Five years after Maria, Puerto Rico still depends on a vulnerable centralized fossil fuel grid. The constant blackouts and energy rate increases hold the population hostage to economic struggle and poverty. In addition, Puerto Ricans live in constant worry and anxiety about what will happen if Puerto Rico is hit by another hurricane like Maria.

In 2019, Puerto Rico passed Act 17, known as the [Puerto Rico Energy Public Policy Act](#), which sets the parameters for a resilient, reliable, and robust energy system with reasonable rates for all customer classes, commits Puerto Rico to powering itself exclusively from **renewable-energy sources** by the year 2050 (40% by 2025, 60% by 2040), phasing out all coal plants by 2028. Act 17 also requires a 30% energy efficiency target by 2040.

Critical Infrastructure

When Hurricane Maria impacted Puerto Rico, [the vulnerability and lack of maintenance](#) of critical infrastructure was evident. Five years after the event, access to essential services have been significantly impacted by inadequate critical infrastructure. Many communities have [constant interruptions](#) or no access to energy, [water](#), and broadband services. Also, education services have been limited by the lack of infrastructure safety and accessibility after the 2020 earthquakes and the administrative closure of hundreds of schools around the island.

For example, broadband is an essential service that failed during the emergency and its aftermath. It is the key tool to allow people to work, study, and receive medical and essential services remotely. Such an essential service must be accessible and affordable for everyone. Even before Maria, it was estimated that only [54% of the households](#) in Puerto Rico had internet access.

Access to adequate water is a human right. Still, the lack of maintenance to Puerto Rico's water dams, aquifers, aqueduct, sewer and drainage infrastructure, make communities vulnerable to severe weather events such as [droughts](#) and flooding.

FEDERAL RESPONSE: 5 YEARS LATER

From 2018-2020 the majority of the money Congress appropriated to support recovery and building following Maria [was intentionally obstructed](#) by the Trump Administration. During [its first year](#), the Biden administration took important steps to aid Puerto Rico's recovery including amending FEMA guidelines so that property owners in a crisis situation can present alternative documentation to establish ownership interest, removing unnecessary barriers to emergency assistance. In January 2022, the administration [approved nearly \\$3 billion](#) in FEMA funds for 3,542 projects for Hurricane Maria and earthquake recovery. *(For an explanation of the barriers the federal government has created for Puerto Rico's recovery, see [TA4PR section Response of the Federal Government to Puerto Rico Since Maria](#).)*

While the Biden administration has moved aggressively to remove many of the barriers to money allocated by Congress, the process for approving appropriate projects and spending remains challenging.

Planning and funding for critical infrastructure needs (schools, roads, water) has been extremely delayed and received band-aids instead of long-term fixes. Effective prioritization and timely execution of rebuilding many other basic elements of the island's infrastructure - especially rebuilding a lifesaving, sustainable grid - are still taking too long to get underway. Although money is finally being allocated for planning, there is no comprehensive plan for reaching the island's goals of 100% renewable energy by 2050. In the meantime, projects are being approved and funded by FEMA (assisted by the U.S. Dept. of Energy), and the government of Puerto Rico that do not demonstrate serious commitment to achieving these goals.

The island has continued to fight to receive federal dollars to recover following Maria, historic earthquakes, and COVID while experiencing a state of ongoing crises. Battered and exhausted residents have [continued](#) to experience [energy insecurity](#), (on a [near daily basis](#)) devastating tropical storms and hurricanes (like [Isaias](#) in July 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic), repeated droughts leading to water restrictions, damaging [flooding](#) on a regular basis, and severe [austerity](#) in public services imposed to repay debt, plus rising cost of living, growing food insecurity, and a severe public health care burden as [a result of the pandemic](#).

Five years later, the Puerto Ricans on and off the island, are still waiting for Congress and the federal government to end the discrimination that has impeded Puerto Rico's economic development and disaster recovery, and directly contributed to high poverty rates.

WHAT IS NEEDED NOW

Both the U.S. Congress and the Biden Administration have a moral responsibility to end the systemic discrimination that treats people who live in Puerto Rico as [second-class citizens](#).

Below you will find some solutions to end discrimination by Congress and the Executive branch to promote equity and a sustainable recovery for Puerto Rico's future. Recommendations range from legislative action, reform in bureaucratic processes by federal agencies, and Executive Action by the Biden Administration. These actions are not to "help" Puerto Ricans; they are the responsibility of a government that created these conditions.

In order for Puerto Rico to rebuild and thrive economically in an equitable manner at least three things must happen:

- I. A just and sustainable recovery
 - Ensure all federal disaster recovery and infrastructure investment funds are effectively used by requiring transparency and civil society input in decision making processes for the sustainable recovery of Puerto Rico.
- II. Equity and an end to discrimination
 - Congress and the federal government must end systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico in all federal programs.
- III. Return democratic self-governance to Puerto Rico
 - By terminating PROMESA, accompanied by a transparent, independent review of the actions of the FOMB, and ensuring a responsible transition to local control.

A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY POLICY ASKS

WHAT CONGRESS must do to achieve a just and sustainable recovery

- Congress should use its oversight and accountability authority to ensure that federal funding is effectively achieving its intended goals.
 - For example, Congress should ensure federal funds are used to rebuild PR's energy grid to meet PR's renewable energy mandates and not continue reliance on fossil fuels. They must also pass [H.R. 8292](#) which would require a report on Puerto Rico's progress towards rebuilding its electric grid.

- For example, Congress should promote radical transparency and democratization of the federal and local recovery and rebuilding process, by requiring agencies to integrate more effective public participation through all phases of recovery decision-making processes and ensure universal language access in all programs.
- Among other legislation, Congress should pass
 - Insular Area Climate Change Act ([S.2613 & H.R.2780](#))
 - Environmental Justice For All Act EJ4All ([H.R.2021 & S.872](#))
 - Renewable Energy for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Act ([H.R.2791](#))
- Ensure Puerto Rico is treated equitably and intentionally in all past and future recovery programs and policies. PR must be fully included in new programs and policies to help the country recover economically, and in any new legislation intended to spur economic development, meet the climate crisis, achieve environmental justice, and in any programs that provide support to those most in need. Policies and legislation should demonstrate an understanding of the realities of the island.
- The responsible use of federal funds must prioritize renewables, energy efficiency, solar energy based on rooftop and storage, microgrids, and programs like demand response to achieve electric bill reductions and ensure fair access to this critical service to all persons in Puerto Rico.
- See NREL 2020 [study](#) demonstrating that rooftop solar can meet all of Puerto Rico's residential energy needs.
- FEMA should not approve any proposals in which renewables are merely incidental to the overall program - *they must be central in any long or short term plans* - funded by federal dollars in order to achieve local and federal goals.
- Ensure Puerto Rico is treated equitably and intentionally, and is not left out of new programs and policies to help the country recover economically, and in any new legislation intended to spur economic development, meet the climate crisis, achieve environmental justice, and in any programs that provide support to those most in need. Policies and legislation should demonstrate an understanding of the realities of the island.
- Continue to eliminate bureaucracies and systemic discriminatory restrictions that have created unique barriers to rebuilding and slowed access to federal disaster funds. The federal government needs to create programs that recognize and respond to Puerto Rico's unique realities, vulnerabilities, and legal framework. Examples include:

WHAT THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION must do to achieve a just and sustainable recovery

- The Biden Administration must do more to ensure that once funds are allocated, they require effective mechanisms for transparency, accountability, meaningful public participation, and are used in a way that addresses the real needs of communities.
- Ensure that all federal funds allocated to Puerto Rico's energy grid, including the largest grant in FEMA history are used to achieve the island's [legislatively mandated](#) climate goals of 40% renewable energy by 2025 and 100% renewable energy by 2050. **Creating a resilient, decentralized energy system in Puerto Rico is not just about reaching climate goals – it is literally a matter of [life and death](#).**
- As of June 2022, a total of nearly \$13 billion in [FEMA funds](#) and \$1.9 billion in CDBG funds has been obligated for emergency and permanent energy projects on the island.
- **Transparency and anti-corruption:** Ensure information about disaster recovery dollars and decision-making processes are publicly available, easily accessible, objectively verifiable at all stages of decision-making including needs-assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring, and ensure official documents are bilingual in Spanish and English.
- **Public engagement and democratization:** Federal agencies should require meaningful and enforceable criteria for public engagement and transparency in every plan for disaster funding approved by federal and local agencies. For example:
 - an [MOU](#) to achieve the reconstruction of the energy grid was signed between HUD, DOE, FEMA, and the local government on Feb 2, 2022. Under the agreement, HUD is required to create a public engagement

plan to ensure input from impacted communities. As of August, 2022, this has not been accomplished. In the meantime, plans are moving forward for reconstruction without public engagement or transparency as required by the MOU.

- \$8.2 billion in [CDBG-MIT funds released](#) to Puerto Rico for resiliency projects requires the creation of Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). Local advocacy groups have [attempted to engage](#) in the process of creation of the CAC, however, the committee is not functioning and decision-making is taking place without the input of the CAC as required by HUD.

- **Reimbursement and matching fund requirements:** Waive reimbursement and matching funds requirements to facilitate maximum participation of local non-profit organizations doing the critical work on the ground.
- **Language barriers:** Ensure access to programs, funding, and information by requiring official documents, programs, and critical staff are available in Spanish.
- **Ownership eligibility requirements for recovery funding:** Ensure federal employees and contractors are trained to recognize Puerto Rico's legal tenancy realities and property law which are different from those in the United States.
- **Federal Tax Credits:** Make federal tax credits available as direct pay options to residents and organizations that do not qualify under U.S. tax law.
- **Accessibility issues:** Create programs that close the digital divide, increase access to affordable broadband, and immediately reform access to federal programs and funding that require broadband internet connectivity.
- **Technical Assistance:** Provide funding for education and technical assistance for local agencies, community-based organizations, and businesses that may be eligible for federal funding but have difficulty accessing and complying with grant application and reporting requirements.
- **Federal Coordination:** Create effective, transparent processes for interagency collaboration to ensure an effective deployment and alignment of federal programs and resources for a holistic recovery. The

announcement of a [White House Puerto Rico Working Group](#) was a welcome step toward creating interagency coordination of resources and technical assistance. Aside from one "[inaugural meeting](#)," the President's "Puerto Rico Working Group" has yet to publicly name its members, internal structure, or responsibilities which hampers their ability to effectively [engage](#) with Congress and Puerto Rico stakeholders, including community-based organizations that work directly with the people most impacted to ensure disaster relief and other federal funds are distributed in an effective, and equitable manner.

EQUITY AND DISCRIMINATION POLICY ASKS

Congress and the federal government must end systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico in all federal programs

WHAT CONGRESS MUST DO to end systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico in all federal programs

- Pass legislation that brings Puerto Rico permanently and equitably into all federal safety-net programs, including Medicaid, Food Stamps (NAP/SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), among others not only to end second class treatment of the 3 million U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico, but also to alleviate high rates of poverty. For example, Congress must pass
 - the provisions in the [Territorial Equity Act of 2021 \(H.R. 2713 & S. 1228\)](#), which would most comprehensively address inequities in federal benefits including Medicaid, SSI, and SNAP.
 - the Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act of 2022; Congress must also include \$3.63 billion for NAP in the 2023 appropriations bill, make permanent changes in the FARM Bill
 - For a full list of legislation we support, see [TA4PR Legislation We Support to Move Puerto Rico Forward](#).

WHAT THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION MUST DO

to end systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico in all federal programs

- President Biden must actively work with Congress to fulfill his campaign commitments laid out in his plan for "[Recovery, Renewal, and Respect for Puerto Rico](#). That includes providing families in Puerto Rico "equal access to nutrition assistance" through full participation in SNAP, ensuring Puerto Ricans receive SSI, and that Puerto Rico participates equitably in Medicaid, including receiving increased FMAP payments by directing the HHS Secretary to develop and recommend payment reforms.
- Biden must direct his Department of Justice [stop defending discrimination](#) in federal programs against Puerto Rico and make clear that the Insular Cases [and the racism they represent are no longer sanctioned by the federal government](#).
 - This exclusion of Puerto Rico from federal safety net programs like SSI and the Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) was both discriminatory and [unconstitutional](#). In *U.S. v. Vaello-Madero* and *Peña Martinez v. United States Health and Human Services*, the courts determined that the government's true purpose in denying SSI benefits to Puerto Ricans was "to impose inequality," and, further, suggested that this exclusion amounted to a "de facto classification based on Hispanic origin" that should be subject to a more stringent "heightened scrutiny standard."
- The Biden Administration must end systemic discrimination throughout all federal agencies by ensuring information and access to programs, funding, and critical staff are accessible to Spanish speakers who make up the majority of Puerto Ricans.

WHAT THE U.S. SUPREME COURT MUST DO to end systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico in all federal programs

- The Supreme Court must recognize the unconstitutionality of the systemic discrimination by the federal government towards Puerto Rico by overturning the so-called Insular Cases.
- Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch said in a [recent federal benefits decision](#), *U.S. v Vaello Madero*, that was unfavorable to Puerto Rico, that overturning the "[shameful](#)" Insular Cases was long overdue. They should use the next opportunity that comes before the court to put an end to this shameful legal chapter in U.S. history.

RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC SELF-GOVERNANCE POLICY ASKS

Return democratic self-governance to Puerto Rico by terminating PROMESA, accompanied by a transparent, independent review of the actions of the FOMB, and ensuring a responsible transition to local control.

WHAT CONGRESS MUST DO to return Puerto Rico to democratic self-governance

- Congress should repeal the failed PROMESA law that has created an unelected body leading to severe austerity in social programs on the island by passing a version of The TRUST for Puerto Rico Act of 2022 that includes mechanisms for transparency and accountability for the actions of the FOMB, and provides for a smooth transition to local governance. Accountability measures for the FOMB should include:
 - An [independent audit](#) performed and certified by civil society experts to determine the [legality of the debt](#) and the impact on any debt agreements entered into by the FOMB.
 - Establishment of "revolving door" prohibitions on any former FOMB employee or contractor prohibiting them from seeking employment with any agency or company that benefited from its decisions.
 - Analysis of the activities and decisions of the FOMB that is reviewed by Congress, and is available through open data mechanisms to the public.
- Congress must not grant any additional authority to the FOMB, which has undemocratic control over Puerto Rico budgetary and recovery matters.

WHAT THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION MUST DO to return Puerto Rico to democratic self-governance

- President Biden should pressure Congress to eliminate the failed PROMESA law.
- The Biden Administration should provide technical assistance through the U.S. Department of Treasury to all relevant Puerto Rican government agencies (AFAF, Hacienda, etc.) to expedite completion of financial audited statements in order for budgets to be certified as balanced in compliance with requirements to dismantle the FOMB.

- President Biden should also keep his [campaign promises](#) to
 - carry out an audit of Puerto Rico's debt to "determine if debt was issued illegally in violation of Puerto Rico's constitution and hence be invalid,"
 - hold the FOMB accountable by supporting 'a review of the fiscal austerity policies imposed by the FOMB,'
 - chart "a new path for tackling Puerto Rico's unsustainable debts that takes into consideration new challenges." Significant debt restructuring is still being negotiated that will impact the ability of the local government to provide basic services for decades to come.

Legislation To Move Puerto Rico Forward

On Sept. 20th, 2022, Puerto Rico will commemorate five years since Hurricane Maria devastated the island. Island residents, exhausted from five years of repeated hardship including floods, severe earthquakes, rising unemployment, austerity, high poverty levels, political instability, and a global pandemic, continue to mourn the [more than 3 thousand](#) lives lost. During the four years of the Trump administration, **Puerto Rico also suffered the impact of the negligence of a federal government that intentionally blocked disaster relief and recovery funds which needlessly delayed the island's recovery process.** Recovery efforts were seriously hampered by this politicized response and suffering was compounded. Congress and the federal government have an obligation to assess what harms were caused by the slow and irresponsible federal response and work to mitigate them. Our federal government has a moral and legal responsibility to help the people of Puerto Rico recover from this tragedy just as it would help any other group of people on U.S. soil.

“ Congress and the Biden administration share equal responsibility for treating Puerto Rico with dignity and for ending the systemic discrimination against the residents of Puerto Rico. ”

Two years after Hurricane Maria, while the island was still waiting for federal disaster recovery aid, Puerto Rico experienced over 9,000 earthquakes and aftershocks (2019-2020), including the [strongest series of earthquakes](#) felt in Puerto Rico in over a century. Hundreds of buildings and thousands of homes were destroyed, resulting in an [estimated \\$3.1 billion in damage](#). Many people slept outside with their families for months out of fear that their homes would collapse. Although the U.S. House of Representatives [passed a disaster aid bill](#) intended to help Puerto Rico recover from the earthquakes, the bill was never passed in the [Republican controlled](#) U.S. Senate and faced a [veto threat from President Trump](#). In June of 2022, two years after the earthquakes, the Biden Administration [approved](#) funding for 700 earthquake-related projects.

As President Biden reaches the halfway mark of his first term, his administration continues to push forward a successful policy agenda to strengthen the entire country's economy and infrastructure. Serious recovery efforts in Puerto Rico have also commenced under the Biden administration, and the island has also benefited from historic legislation in the wake of the pandemic such as the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), the [American Rescue Plan \(ARPA\)](#), and the recently passed [Inflation Reduction Act](#).

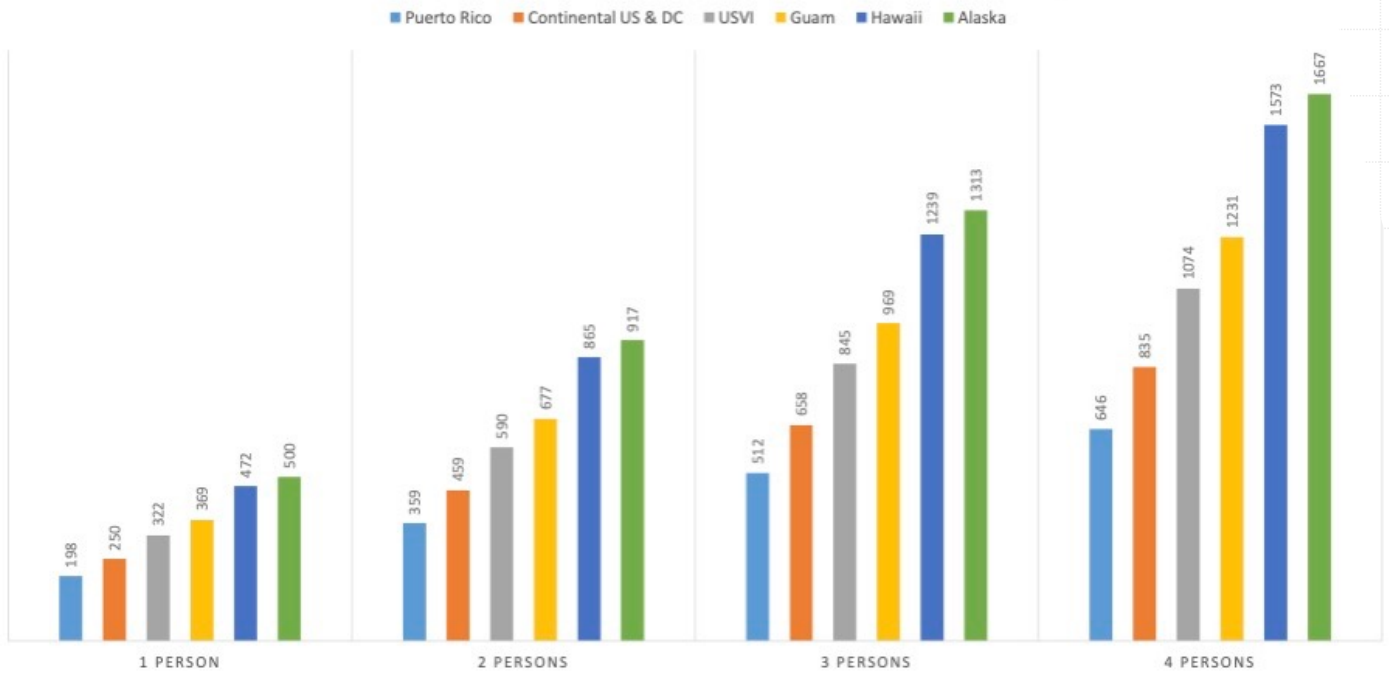
However, Puerto Rico continues to experience the effects of inequitable access and unique barriers to federal programs. The federal government must acknowledge the systemic discrimination that has been imposed for over 100 years, compounded by the intentional negligence following Maria and assume responsibility by taking immediate action to treat Puerto Rico equitably in those policies.

CONGRESS MUST END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PUERTO RICO IN FEDERAL FUNDING

The federal government [has discriminated against the U.S. citizens](#) of Puerto Rico since it forcibly acquired the island as a “territory” in 1898. For example, Puerto Rico receives limited or no funds for many federal benefits and programs, such as [Medicaid](#), [SNAP](#) (food stamps), [SSI](#) for the blind, disabled, and elderly, and the Child Tax Credit (until 2021, only available to Puerto Rican families with at least three children), among others. The lack of parity in funding for federal benefit programs, especially those designed to alleviate poverty, has worsened the economic, social, and environmental vulnerabilities in the island.

“ This discriminatory (at best) and unconstitutional (at worst) treatment is one of the main causes of Puerto Rico's current economic crisis and the island's high poverty levels. ”

PUERTO RICO NAP VS. SNAP STATES & TERRITORIES TODAY
 ALASKA MAXIMUM BENEFITS - RURAL 2 REGION (1 OF 3 DESIGNATED REGIONS)



NAP Graphic Source: Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico

Funding for nutrition assistance provides one stark example. U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico are excluded from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which prevents them from receiving the same nutrition assistance provided to other low-income U.S. citizens that reside in the states. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit globally in March 2020, Puerto Rico has seen over 250,000 more NAP beneficiaries – a 19% increase.

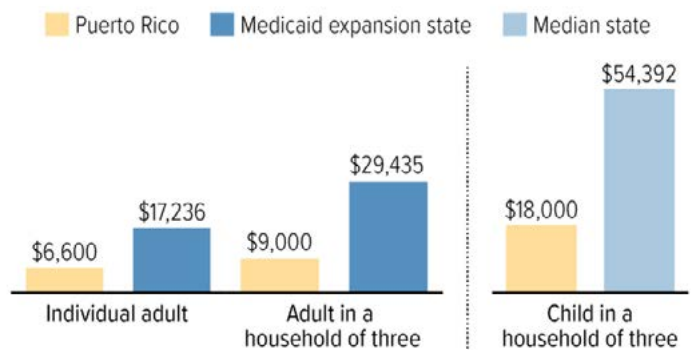
For an explainer about food insecurity and inequities in Puerto Rico [watch Mazon’s Insider Briefing Series — Addressing Food Insecurity in Puerto Rico \(May 12, 2022\)](#).

NAP GRAPHIC SOURCE: COALITION FOR FOOD SECURITY PUERTO RICO

Inequitable funding for Medicaid provides another example of the injustice faced by Puerto Rico, which receives much lower funding levels. Unlike the U.S. states that receive needs-based federal funds, Puerto Rico’s Medicaid program is funded through a statutory cap and fixed matching rate, resulting in a more restricted Medicaid program. Among other things, the funding structure means that Puerto Rico [can’t afford to cover seven of Medicaid’s 17 mandatory services, including nursing home care and nurse practitioner services](#). To make the limited federal grant dollars cover as many people as possible, only the very poorest of Puerto Rico residents qualify for Medicaid (See chart on right).

Medicaid Eligibility Limits Much Lower in Puerto Rico Than in States

Annual income caps for program eligibility



Note: Under the Affordable Care Act, states can expand Medicaid to adults with income up to 138 percent of the poverty line. Puerto Rico expanded eligibility for adults, but at a much lower poverty level. For Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, states and Puerto both cover children at higher income levels than adults. But, states cover children up to much higher income levels than Puerto Rico does.

Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

Source: [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)

Legislation Your Member of Congress Should Support

A ROADMAP

This document provides you with a range of actions Congress can take to address decades of inequities and help the island rebuild sustainably. They range from ensuring Puerto Rico receives equitable treatment in federal programs intended to support the most vulnerable residents, to rebuilding sustainable infrastructure, to providing assistance to address climate challenges. The overwhelming majority of bills introduced in the 117th Congress to provide equity to Puerto Rico are never even considered in Congressional committees, much less presented for votes.

Many of these provisions could and should be considered for inclusion in any appropriate spending or legislative package. We must insist that Congress treat Puerto Rico equitably in all legislation moving forward. *See [TakeAction4PR 2022 Policy Asks here](#).*

EQUITY IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS

[Territorial Equity Act of 2021 \(H.R. 2713 & S. 1228\)](#)

Representative Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY) and **Senator Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) [introduced the Territorial Equity Act of 2021](#) in April of last year. This is a broad bill that contemplates equitable solutions to federal safety-net programs which would help Puerto Rico, and all the territories, gain more equitable access to federal programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and important tax credits. Similar bills were introduced in [2017](#) and [2018](#), however they did not receive a vote in the Senate floor. Territorial residents are currently treated as second-class citizens under these programs which is not only morally wrong, but also exacerbates social and economic inequalities. After more than 120 years of discriminatory funding which has contributed to some of the [highest poverty rates in the country](#) (43.4%), this bill will end discrimination against residents in Puerto Rico in Medicaid, SSI, and SNAP programs. The most recent House and Senate bills were introduced on April 20, 2021.

Cosponsors: Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), Del. Michael San Nicolas (D-Guam), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA).

Status: Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means, and the Committees on Energy and Commerce, Agriculture, Education and Labor, and Natural Resources by the House of Representatives to date. Also referred to the Subcommittee on Health by the Committee on Energy and Commerce and to the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations by the Committee on Agriculture to date. [No further action](#) has been taken.

[Supplemental Security Income Equality Act \(H.R. 537\)](#)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a program in which the federal government financially assists people ages 65 and older with income under the poverty level and minors with disabilities or conditions that affect the family and the individual's ability to generate enough income to live. Currently, most residents of the U.S. territories are not eligible for this federal program. Introduced by **Resident Commissioner González-Colón** (R-PR-At Large), this bill would extend the SSI program to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam.

Cosponsors: Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI-At Large), Del. Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS-At Large), Del. Gregorio Sablan (D-MP-At Large), Del. Michael San Nicolas (D-GU-At Large).

Status: In January 2021, the bill was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. It was then referred to the House Subcommittee on Social Security.

[Territories Statistics Collection Equity Act \(H.R. 8593\)](#)

Introduced by **Rep. Raul Grijalva** (D-AZ), [this bipartisan bill](#) will direct the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) to develop a plan to collect and publish statistics regarding the U.S. Territories in the same manner as states and it would require the agency to publish a list and assessment of existing federal statistical programs that collect and publish data for the U.S. Territories comparable to the States. H.R. 8593 would also require the agency to submit a plan to collect and publish statistics regarding territories within one year along with recommendations and costs to implement.

Cosponsors: Del. Gregorio Sablan (D-MP), Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), Del. Michael San Nicolas (D-GU), Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Colón (R-PR), and Del. Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS).

Status: In July of 2021, the bill was referred to the House Natural Resources Committee and to the House Committee Oversight and Reform. [No further action](#) has been taken. No Senate companion bill has been introduced.

[House Resolution Rejecting the Supreme Court's decisions in the Insular Cases \(H.Res. 279\)](#)

H.Res. 279 was introduced by **Rep. Raul Grijalva** (D-AZ) on March 26, 2021. This bipartisan resolution acknowledges that the United States Supreme Court's decisions in the [Insular Cases](#) and the "territorial incorporation doctrine" are contrary to the principles of the United States Constitution. The resolution

states that these cases are relics of the [racial views](#) of an earlier era that have no place in our Nation today, and opposes their application in all future and present cases. This resolution sends a strong message in Congress that constitutional and democratic principles must also apply to the U.S. territories.

Cosponsors: Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), Del. Gregorio Sablan (D-MP), Del. Michael San Nicolas (D-GU), Resident Commissioner Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR), Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY), Rep. Chuy Garcia (D-IL), Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), Del. Eleanor Holmes (D-DC), Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA), Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN), Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Rep. James McGovern (D-MA).

Status: On March 26, 2021 it was referred to the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Judiciary Committee. In May of 2021, the resolution was examined during a House Natural Resource Committee hearing. Most recently, in October of 2021, the legislation was referred to the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties.

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

[Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2023 \(H.R. 8239 & S.4661\)](#)

H.R. 8239, the House appropriations bill for FY 2023, introduced by **Rep. Sanford Bishop** (D-GA), includes \$3.63B in funding for Puerto Rico's Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP). This includes an additional [\\$1 billion](#) amendment to [restore basic nutritional benefits](#) for Puerto Rico. Even this level of funding does not bring Puerto Rico to the standards of the SNAP benefits. Multiple members of Congress from both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) have [called](#) on their respective appropriations committees to increase the program's funding by \$1 billion in order to combat food insecurity on the island. The TakeAction4 Puerto Rico Campaign stands with these Members of Congress and [local advocates](#) in their call for extra funding as the bill makes its way to the House and Senate floor for a final vote.

Status: On June 23, 2022, H.R. 8239 [was passed](#) by the House Appropriations Committee with a 31 to 26 vote. Now the Senate version, S. 4661 must be amended to include the provisions of the House version and then voted on in both the House and Senate for final passage.

[Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act of 2022 \(H.R.8495\)](#)

The bipartisan Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Act was introduced by Resident Commissioner **Jennifer González-Colón** (R-PR-At Large) on July 26, 2022. If passed, the bill would amend the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 to transition Puerto

Rico to the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), granting low-income Puerto Rican families access to some [much needed funding](#) for nutritional assistance. The Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness would also ensure that the government of Puerto Rico is offered the technical assistance needed in order to make a smooth transition from the current Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) to SNAP.

Cosponsors: This bill has five cosponsors: Rep. James McGovern (D-MA), Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Val Demings (D-FL), Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA).

Status: In September of 2021, the legislation was referred to the House Committee on Agriculture. It was later referred to the House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations. No further action has been taken.

[Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2021 \(H.R. 4077 & S. 2192\)](#)

Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC) [introduced](#) the Closing the Meal Gap to amend the Food and Nutrition Act of 2021 to expand and strengthen Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for vulnerable community members struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table. **Senators Kirsten Gillibrand** (D-NY), **Bernie Sanders** (D-VT), **Cory Booker** (D-NJ), **Alex Padilla** (D-CA), and **Elizabeth Warren** (D-MA) [introduced](#) the bill in the U.S. Senate. The bill would provide for a transition for the territories into the SNAP program, ending the inequity of excluding Puerto Rico and other territories from full participation in SNAP. Congress has allowed a two-tier system of nutrition benefits for U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico for nearly 40 years and it must end. See the fact sheet [here](#).

Cosponsors: The Senate version is co-sponsored by Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-VT). The House bill has [110 co-sponsors](#).

Status: Introduced on June 23, 2021. S. 2192 was read twice and referred to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. On July 28, 2021, H.R. 4077 was referred to the House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations.

HEALTHCARE

[Puerto Rico Health Care Fairness, Accountability, and Beneficiary Access Act of 2021 \(H.R.1722\)](#)

Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY) [re-introduced](#) the bipartisan Puerto Rico Health Care Fairness, Accountability, and Beneficiary Access Act of 2021 to provide a path for Puerto Rico to be [treated equitably](#) when it comes to health care for low-income people. Although the Biden administration approved an additional [\\$3 billion](#) in Medicaid funding to

the island, that amount still keeps Medicaid funding in Puerto Rico below funding for the states. However, Puerto Rico now faces a health care crisis with supplementary Medicaid funding set to expire in December 2022 (the so-called [Medicaid “cliff”](#)). If passed, the bill would provide \$15.1 billion in federal funding to raise the federal government’s portion to align with funding levels received by the states (83% FMAP). The bill provides for a 10-year transition period and includes funding to cover mandatory health benefits received by other Medicaid recipients in the states.

Co-sponsors: Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-NY), Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rep. Jesus Garcia (D-IL), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), and Resident Commissioner Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR).

Status: Introduced March 9, 2021; referred to Subcommittee on Health date.

[Territories Health Equity Act of 2021 \(H.R.3434\)](#)

The bipartisan Territories Health Equity Act of 2021 was [introduced](#) by **Del. Plaskett** (D-VI) in May 2021. The bill would eliminate the annual federal Medicaid funding cap that limits the Medicaid funding in all U.S. territories. It would also increase the federal matching rate ([FMAP](#)) to the same levels as received by the states, provide increased funding for prescription drugs to low-income seniors, and update historically low [hospital reimbursement rates](#) which has contributed to health care providers leaving the territories.

Cosponsors: This bill has [18 co-sponsors](#) including original co-sponsors Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), and Resident Commissioner Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR).

Status: On May 20, 2021, H.R. 3434 was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Ways and Means. No [further action](#) has been taken.

[Supporting Medicaid in the U.S. Territories Act of 2021 \(H.R.4406\)](#)

The bipartisan Supporting Medicaid in the U.S. Territories Act of 2021 was a [bipartisan measure](#) introduced by **Rep. Darren Soto** (D-FL) and **Rep. Gus Bilirakis** (R-FL) in July 2021 to address the [looming Medicaid cliff](#) in Puerto Rico and other territories. It would provide a stopgap measure of five years of Medicaid funding for Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories. The bill would ensure low-income Puerto Ricans continue to receive Medicaid benefits by temporarily extending the [federal assistance percentage](#) and capped dollar amount for U.S. territories. In addition, this bill would also increase the cap amount in the Covid-19 response.

Cosponsors: This bill has [34 co-sponsors](#).

Status: On July 21, 2021, H.R. 4406 was marked up in the Committee on Energy and Commerce and passed with a majority vote. *See Hispanic Federation statement [here](#).* No further [action](#) has been taken.

[Vieques Recovery and Redevelopment Act of 2021 \(H.R.1317 & S. 405\)](#)

Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY) and **Sen. Bob Menendez** (D-NJ) introduced the bipartisan Vieques Recovery and Redevelopment Act of 2021. This bill provides compensation to residents of the small island in the archipelago who may have contracted a chronic or life threatening case of cancer, hypertension, cirrhosis, kidney disease, diabetes, or heavy metal poisoning during or after the U.S. Navy bombed the island for 60 years for military training purposes. The island has some of the [highest sickness rates in the Caribbean](#) and compensation from the U.S. government is long overdue.

Cosponsors: The Senate bill co-sponsored by Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS) and the House bill by Rep. Jesus Garcia (D-IL), Rep. Trent Kelly (R-MS), Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), and Resident Commission Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR-At Large).

Status: On July 30, 2021, the House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on the bill. This year, during the House Natural Resources Committee Build Back Better Markup, the committee approved a partial \$500 million dollar allocation for Vieques.

[Territories Medicare Prescription Drug Assistance Equity Act of 2022 \(S. 3778\)](#)

The Territories Medicare Prescription Drug Assistance Equity Act of 2022 was introduced by **Sen. Bob Menendez** (D-NJ) in March 2022. This bill would amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to make healthcare more affordable for low-income seniors such as Medicare part D beneficiaries who reside in Puerto Rico or other territories.

Cosponsors: This bill has four cosponsors including Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Sen. Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM).

Status: On March 8, 2022, the legislation was referred to the Committee on Finance. No further action has been taken since.

[Achieving Equity in the Treatment of Dual Eligible Beneficiaries Act \(H.R. 7997\)](#)

Introduced by **Resident Commissioner González-Colón** (R-PR-At Large), this bipartisan bill would address Medicare funding disparities by giving seniors in the territories access to the Medicare Savings Program and establishes a Medicare Advantage geographic adjustment (AGA), which would ensure rates accurately reflect the cost of delivering care in different geographic regions.

Cosponsors: Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL), Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL), Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE), Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-NY), Del. Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS-At Large), Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Rep. Stephanie Murphy (D-FL).

Status: On July 9, 2022, it was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Ways and Means.

CLIMATE

[Environmental Justice For All Act EJ4All](#) (H.R.2021 & S.872)

The Environmental Justice For All was re-introduced on March 18, 2021 in both chambers of Congress by **Sen. Tammy Duckworth** (D-IL) [in the Senate](#) and by **Rep. Raul Grijalva** (D-AZ) and Rep. A. Donald McEachin (D-VA) [in the House](#). This bill would establish several environmental justice requirements and programs to address the disproportionate environmental effects of federal laws or programs on communities of color, low-income communities, or tribal and indigenous communities. The main purpose of this bicameral legislation is to address the disproportionate effects the climate crisis has had on communities of color across the nation.

Cosponsors: The House version has [104 cosponsors](#). The Senate bill is cosponsored by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN), Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL), Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sen. Brian Shatz (D-HI), Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA), Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA), and Sen. Robert Casey (D-PA).

Status: On February 15, 2022, the House Natural Resources Committee held a [hearing](#) on the House version of the bill. Later in July of 2022, the committee held a markup session on the bill where it was [voted out of committee](#) (26-21) and is currently awaiting a house floor vote. The Senate version was read twice and referred to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. No [further action](#) has been taken since.

[Insular Area Climate Change Act](#) (H.R. 2780 & S.2613)

The Insular Area Climate Change Act was introduced in both chambers of Congress by **Sen. Bob Menendez** (D-NJ) and **Sen. Mazie Hirono** (D-HI) [in the Senate](#) on August 4, 2021 and by **Rep. Raul Grijalva** (D-AZ) [in the House](#) on April 22, 2021. This bill would provide financial and technical support to the more than 3.5 million U.S. citizens and nationals that reside in U.S. affiliated insular areas for climate change through planning, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience efforts.

Cosponsors: H.R. 2780 co-sponsors include Del. Gregorio Killili Camacho Sablan (D-MP), Del. Michael San Nicolas (D-GU), Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY), Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN), Rep. Donald McEachin (D-VA), Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA), Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), Rep. Melanie Ann Stansbury (D-NM), Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO). The Senate version is cosponsored by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sen. Christopher Murphy (D-CT), Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ).

Status: On July 14, 2021, H.R. 2780 passed the House Natural Resources Committee and is currently awaiting a House floor vote. S. 2613 has been read twice and referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. No further action has been taken.

ENERGY

[To require a report on Puerto Rico's progress toward rebuilding the electric grid](#) (H.R. 8292)

Introduced by Rep. **Ritchie Torres** (D-NY) with the co-sponsorship of Resident Commissioner **Jennifer González-Colón** (R-PR-At Large), this bill would require a report on Puerto Rico's progress toward rebuilding the electric grid. The bill would also require the report to detail the efforts the Federal Government is undertaking to expedite the rebuilding process.

Status: On July 5, 2022 the bill was referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure where it was subsequently referred to the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. No [further action](#) has been taken.

[Renewable Energy for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Act](#) (H.R.2791)

The Renewable Energy for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Act [introduced](#) by Rep. **Ted Lieu** (D-CA) on April 22, 2021, would direct the Secretary of Agriculture (USDA) to establish a renewable energy grant program for Puerto Rico and other territories. In addition, this bill intends to promote renewable energy in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands by awarding grants to nonprofits, and the Department of Energy's National Laboratories may provide technical assistance. Specifically, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) must establish a grant program under which USDA may award grants for renewable energy systems, energy efficiency activities, energy storage, smart grids, or microgrids. In addition, USDA may award grants to train residents of Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands to develop, construct, maintain, or operate renewable energy systems.

Cosponsors: This bill is cosponsored by Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Albio Sires (D-NJ), Rep. Val Butler Demings (D-FL), Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI-At Large), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), and Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Colón (R-PR-At Large).

Status: On June 21, 2021, H.R. 2791 was referred to the House Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit. No [further action](#) has been taken.

PUERTO RICO ECONOMIC SELF-GOVERNANCE

[TRUST for Puerto Rico Act of 2022 \(H.R. 7409\)](#)

The TRUST for Puerto Rico Act of 2022 introduced by **Rep. Ritchie Torres** (D-NY) is bipartisan legislation that would provide a process for a speedier dissolution of the Financial Oversight and Management Board of Puerto Rico. It would terminate the Oversight Board no later than 90 days after the certification of two balanced budgets and transfers all duties and responsibilities to the Government of Puerto Rico after the Oversight Board is terminated. If the bill is passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden, it could lead to the Oversight Board leaving Puerto Rico as soon as late 2023 or early 2024, if the balanced budgets are certified. The TakeAction4 Puerto Rico Campaign supports amendments to this bill that would require transparency and accountability for the actions of the FOMB and provide for a smooth transition to local governance.

Cosponsors: The TRUST for Puerto Rico Act of 2022 has 10 **cosponsors:** Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR), Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL), Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-NY), Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY), Rep. Thomas Suozzi (D-NY), Rep. Chuy García (D-IL), Rep. Katie Porter (D-CA), and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY).

Status: On April 5th, 2022, the bill was referred to the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Judiciary Committee.

[Territory Economic Development Tax Credit Act \(H.R. 5032 & S.2485\)](#)

The bipartisan Territory Economic Development Tax Credit Act was introduced in both chambers of Congress by Rep. **Thomas Suozzi** (D-NY) in the House and Sen. **Bob Menendez** (D-NJ) in the Senate. If passed, the legislation would amend the Internal Revenue Code to provide a credit for economic activity. It establishes a new tax credit for wages and tangible investments made by U.S. domestic corporations with branches operating in U.S. territories. The bill requires that 80% of creditable income must be derived from a territory during a 3-year period, and 75% must come from an active trade or business in a territory.

Cosponsors: The house bill has four cosponsors: Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY), Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Rep. John Larson (D-CT), and Del. Michael San Nicolas (D-GU-At Large). In the Senate, the bill has bipartisan support with the cosponsorship of Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS).

Status: In August of 2021, the bill was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. The Senate version has been read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance. The House-passed version of the original Build Back Better bill included similar tax incentives like the ones in this legislation.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) signed by President Biden in August, 2022 unfortunately did not include these provisions.

[Puerto Rico Air Cargo Industry Empowerment Act \(H.R. 1824\)](#)

For centuries the Jones Act, a [protectionist](#) shipping law, has made costs of consumer goods in the island [unnecessarily expensive](#). Similar to the Jones Act, air cargo is also restricted by federal law in a similar way, which in turn has resulted in higher prices. Introduced on March 12, 2021 by Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR), this bill would modify foreign air cargo regulations to allow foreign civil aircraft to stop in Puerto Rico and exchange cargo with other air carriers in the same way that is allowed in Alaska. The TakeAction4 Puerto Rico Campaign supports this legislation as well as repealing the Jones Act.

Cosponsors: This bill has 0 cosponsors.

Status: On March 12, 2021, was referred to the House Subcommittee on Aviation. No [further action](#) has been taken.

HOUSING

[Housing is Infrastructure Act of 2021 \(H.R.4497\)](#)

This bill was introduced on July 16, 2021, by **Rep Maxine Waters** (D-CA) as [part of a package of bills](#) intended to address the [growing housing crisis](#) by investing in affordable housing, increase access to homeownership and address the shame of mass homelessness in our country. The creation of programs and investments in equitable, affordable, and accessible housing infrastructure and providing affordable housing to low-income families in the United States, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories is long overdue.

Cosponsors: The bill has [80 co-sponsors](#).

Status: On July 16, 2021, the bill was referred to various House Committees including the House Financial Services Committee. That same month, Rep. Maxine Waters made [introductory remarks](#) on the legislation during a House session for Congressional Record. No [further action](#) has been taken since.

You can go [here](#) to see the legislation **TakeAction4PR!** supported in 2021.

Response of the Federal Government to Puerto Rico Since Hurricane Maria

INTRODUCTION

It has been more than five years since Hurricane Maria impacted Puerto Rico. It was an unprecedented emergency that left death and destruction in its wake. Reconstruction is still a far way off. The more than 3,000 deaths, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents, the blue tarps on rooftops that make daily life challenging, the months of lost schooling, the long, anxious wait for expected help to arrive, and night after night, month after month of darkness, resulting from this tragedy. [3.2 million](#) U.S. citizens struggled to live through the [longest blackout in U.S. history](#) (11 months) and one of the [largest disruption to energy customers in U.S. history](#). [One third of the deaths](#) were attributed to delayed or interrupted health care. There is no doubt that both U.S. federal, and Puerto Rico central governments failed to manage the crisis and protect the people.

Immediate Aftermath/Response

The federal governments response was determined to be [inefficient](#), [ineffective](#), and [unequitable](#). It was hampered from the outset by a lack of familiarity and insensitivity to cultural norms, local government and institution structures, a unique legal framework, and language barriers. The lack of cultural and language competence coupled with [poor contracting](#) processes, political interference alternating with the [complete indifference of the Trump administration](#), and unprecedented [bureaucratic barriers](#) imposed on Puerto Rico, has undermined and severely hampered recovery and rebuilding efforts on the archipelago.

A [2020 investigation of FEMA](#) by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that "Commodities successfully delivered to Puerto Rico took an average of 69 days to reach their final destinations." The same OIG report found that "FEMA lost visibility of about 38% of its commodity shipments to Puerto Rico, worth an estimated \$257 million. Inadequate FEMA contractor oversight contributed to [problems] and delayed commodity shipments. FEMA did not use its Global Positioning System transponders to track commodity shipments, allowed the contractor to break inventory seals, and did not ensure documented proof of commodity deliveries." Given the lost visibility and delayed shipments, "FEMA cannot ensure it provided commodities to Puerto Rico disaster survivors as needed to sustain life and alleviate suffering as part of its response and recovery mission"

The U.S. government response was slow and underwhelming, [especially when compared](#) to the assistance offered by the [Trump administration](#) after Hurricane Harvey, which ravaged Texas and the southeast just weeks before Irma and Maria. [Numerous analyses](#) show that the [disaster response to the three areas](#) - Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico - impacted by hurricanes within weeks of each other did not align with storm severity and likely affected deaths and recovery rates.

Response of the Federal Government to Puerto Rico Following Earthquakes 2019/2020

From December 2019 through December 2020, while the island was still waiting for federal aid for Maria, Puerto Rico experienced over 9,000 earthquakes and aftershocks, including the strongest series of earthquakes felt in Puerto Rico in over a century. Hundreds of buildings and thousands of homes were destroyed, resulting in an [estimated \\$3.1 billion in damage](#). Many people slept outside with their families for months out of fear that their homes would collapse. Although the U.S. House of Representatives [passed a disaster aid bill](#) intended to help Puerto Rico recover from the earthquakes, the bill was never passed in the [Republican-controlled](#) U.S. Senate and faced a [veto threat from President Trump](#). **To date, Congress has not appropriated any disaster funds to help Puerto Rico address the resulting damage from the 2020 earthquakes. Finally in 2021, the Biden Administration allocated \$3 billion for earthquake repairs.**

From 2018 - 2020 most of the money Congress appropriated to support recovery and rebuilding following Maria was withheld by the Trump Administration.

Five Years of Ongoing Crises

For the past five years Puerto Rico has experienced an ongoing state of crisis. Continued [energy insecurity](#), electricity [rate increases](#), devastating tropical storms and hurricanes (like [Isaias](#) in July 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic), repeated [droughts](#) leading to water restrictions, damaging [flooding](#) on a regular basis, [earthquakes](#) and severe [austerity](#) in public services imposed to repay debt, plus [widespread unemployment](#) and overburdened healthcare system as a result of the pandemic, growing food insecurity, have left the island and its residents battered and exhausted.

Response of the Federal Government to Hurricane Maria - Where Does It Stand?

During its first year, the Biden administration took important steps to aid Puerto Rico's recovery including amending FEMA guidelines so that property owners in a crisis situation can present alternative documentation to establish ownership interest. Under President Biden, HUD also reached an agreement with the government of Puerto Rico to [eliminate unique restrictions](#) imposed on the CDBG \$8.2 billion dollars in CDBG-DR funds.

“\$62 billion has been allocated by Congress for rebuilding post-Maria - however, damage estimates are between \$100 to \$139 billion.”

Since 2018, approximately "\$62 billion has been Congressionally appropriated to Puerto Rico in federal disaster funding for rebuilding post-Maria. However, damage estimates range between [\\$100 billion](#) and [\\$139 billion](#)" leaving a significant gap between the money appropriated by Congress and the damage estimates.

As of August 2022, of the [\\$62 billion](#) "appropriated" to Puerto Rico for hurricane disaster relief, only \$19.8 billion, or 32% of the federal funds have been "disbursed."¹ (*Puerto Rico Disaster Recovery Transparency Portal [COR3 Financial Analysis and Summary](#) updated 8/25/22.*) Nearly 82% of the \$62 billion appropriated by Congress in 2018 following Maria are allocated through two federal agencies: FEMA programs (more than \$30 billion), and HUD-CDBG-DR programs (\$20.2 billion).

FEMA is the lead federal agency responsible for assisting Puerto Rico to recover from disasters. Locally, FEMA collaborates with the [Puerto Rico Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resiliency](#) ("COR3"), and HUD works with the Puerto Rico Housing Department, [Departamento de Vivienda](#). The Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Programs provide grants to states, territories, cities, municipalities, and non-profits to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low and moderate-income persons.

As of August 2022, only 4% (\$823 million) of the \$20 billion CDBG funds allocated for Puerto Rico's recovery have been disbursed by FEMA.

¹ The Federal Appropriations Process and Disaster Assistance | Congress makes decisions about spending specific funds through a complicated "appropriations process."

The key concepts to understand in this process are:

- First, Congressional committees of jurisdiction draft and negotiate appropriation bills, which provide the legal authority to obligate and spend money from the U.S. Treasury.
- Second, funds are then allocated, sometimes by legislation, but most often by the Office of Management and Budget ("OMB"), which authorizes the transfer of funds from a global appropriation account to fund a specific program run by a government agency.
- Third, funds are then obligated, this occurs when a government agency makes a definite commitment that generates a legal liability of the federal government for the payment of goods and/or services.
- Finally, an expenditure or outlay occurs when a specific amount is paid by a federal agency. In plain language, this is when the U.S. Treasury writes [disburses] a check to pay for the program.

Source: Center for a New Economy CNE "[Taking Stock of Puerto Rico's Reconstruction Process](#)," Sergio M. Marxuach (May 27, 2020)

Challenges Getting FEMA and CDBG Disaster Aid to the Island

FEMA - HOME REPAIRS/REPLACEMENT ASSISTANCE

The Individuals and Households Program IHP Home Repairs/Replacement Assistance are intended to provide financial assistance to homeowners whose primary residence was damaged or destroyed when the damage is not covered by insurance. In addition to many findings in the Government Accountability Office report on 2017-2018 Hurricanes and Wildfires ([GAO-18-472](#)), the assistance program was riddled with obstacles for survivors including:

- an online application for assistance, even though only half of Puerto Rico has broadband access and at the time telecommunications systems were not functioning ([GAO report](#), p. 37)
- limited regional assistance centers for in-person support ([GAO report](#), p. 50)
- inspectors who did not understand Puerto Rico's home addresses or housing realities and left homes uninspected ([GAO report](#), p. 37)
- FEMA did not have enough bilingual employees to communicate with local residents or translate documents ([GAO report](#), p. 37)
- FEMA reliance on land-based emergency communications ([GAO report](#), p. 38)
- long waits for inspections, and lack of meaningful language access ([GAO report](#), p. 37)
- shortage of debris removal contractors ([GAO report](#), p. 39-40)
- deployment of FEMA personnel not physically able to handle the extreme or austere environment of the territories, which detracted from mission needs ([GAO report](#), p. 36)

According to [FEMA's Region II Hurricane Annex](#), information in Puerto Rico must be conveyed in Spanish—which is the main spoken and written language. Yet FEMA inspectors who could not communicate in Spanish were still deployed to inspect homes, which unsurprisingly resulted in incomplete inspections, misunderstandings, under-estimates for financial assistance, and denials.

FEMA - DENIALS OF ASSISTANCE

Perhaps the most egregious problem that prevented survivors from participating in the assistance program was FEMA's decision to apply an arbitrary title documentation requirement for proof of ownership, which resulted in [broad denials](#) based on "ownership not verified." In Puerto Rico, local housing law does not require homeowners to hold a title unless they have a mortgage. At the time, up to [55%](#) of homeowners did not hold a "title" in the commonly used sense of the word in the United States. However, in Puerto Rico home ownership is officially recognized in different ways. Thousands of homes were built informally, some communities share a collective ownership through land trusts, and family property has been passed down and divided by family members over generations. Despite being informed by local government and advocates about Puerto Rico's legal anomalies that do not require many homeowners to hold formal title, FEMA chose to continue requiring a formal title for almost a year using that as an excuse to deny homeowners desperately seeking assistance. In August 2018, after nearly 80% of applications had been denied mainly for title issues, FEMA [finally conceded](#) that the [Stafford Act](#) does not require a title to prove ownership and agreed to accept a sworn affidavit. FEMA [made no meaningful effort](#) to inform the public and those individuals previously denied that they could appeal the denial by FEMA and provide alternative proof of ownership.

- This remained a problem for disaster victims following the 2020 earthquakes even after FEMA updated its guidelines ([2019](#) and [2021](#)).

FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BARRIERS

Although Congress appropriated \$62 billion in federal funds for disaster relief and reconstruction of Puerto Rico after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Trump Administration placed restrictions such as [Section 428 of the Stafford Act](#) that made it more difficult for the government of Puerto Rico and recovery partners to access the FEMA funds. See [GAO's report Puerto Rico Disaster Recovery: FEMA Actions Needed to Strengthen Project Cost Estimation and Awareness of Program Guidance](#) that recommends FEMA revises its cost estimating guidance for Public Assistance funding for Puerto Rico and make information more accessible and easier to follow for recovery partners.²

In addition, the [reimbursement requirement](#) of the PA program represents a huge barrier for the disbursement of the funds, since most of the 78 municipalities do not have enough money in their budgets to start the infrastructure projects. At the same time, the fact that the application process is in English created a language access barrier for municipalities because most of their staff mainly speak Spanish. The same could be said for nonprofits interested in participating in the program.

With regards to FEMA's matching funds/cost share requirements, on September 25, 2017, eight members of Congress [wrote to Elaine Duke](#), then Acting Secretary of U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and requested a waiver of FEMA matching requirements for Puerto Rico. They rightly explained that "Puerto Rico's current economic conditions have already pushed the local government's financial resources to the breaking point. Requiring cost-sharing during this critical time could take local resources away from providing the essential services many citizens need."

CDBG-DR BARRIERS TO ASSISTANCE

In January 2020, the Trump Administration imposed a [Federal Financial Monitor](#) to oversee the grant administration and disbursement process of disaster recovery funds to Puerto Rico. This was a requirement unique to Puerto Rico and created unnecessary bureaucratic oversight that slowed down the recovery process. Also, allocation of the CDBG Mitigation (\$8.2 billion) and energy funds (\$1.9 billion), among other federal funds [were unfairly and deliberately delayed](#) by the Trump administration.

Serious recovery efforts have commenced under the Biden administration, and Puerto Rico has also benefited from historic legislation in the wake of the pandemic such as the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) and the [American Rescue Plan \(ARPA\)](#). However, Puerto Rico continues to experience the effects of inequitable access and unique barriers to federal programs.

URGENT, UNMET NEEDS

The Puerto Rico Housing Department (PRHD) *Vivienda*, has not moved quickly enough to repair roofs. These numbers show how slow progress has been and how much assistance is still needed.

- In 2021, four years after Maria, PRHD reported that 18,000 homes were still under blue tarps.
- As of [August 2022](#), PRHD reports that they have only completed 3,958 requests for assistance out of approximately 27,000 applications received under the Repair, Reconstruction, and Relocation (R3) program.

DISPLACEMENT BEFORE MITIGATION

The PR Department of Housing (*Departamento de la Vivienda, or Vivienda*) estimates that more than 200,000 homes in Puerto Rico are located within 100-year flood plains. [Numerous complaints](#) have been filed with HUD's Office of the Inspector General, complaining that the Puerto Rico Action Plan for CDBG-DR funds [failed to address any disaster mitigation strategies](#), focusing instead on the relocation of families in flood plains. Individuals and communities should know all their potential mitigation alternatives before having to relocate. Single-home mitigation alternatives are not enough. *Vivienda* should provide technical assistance to communities and engage in participatory planning to evaluate and implement community level mitigation alternatives prioritizing safety and the right to decide where people want to live *prior* to relocating and disrupting communities.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN PUERTO RICO

The same challenge to access FEMA assistance because of mismanagement of property title issues also provides a barrier to accessing CDBG funds. Puerto Rico property laws are different from those in the United States. There is a historic issue of informal housing, especially in the most vulnerable communities. Many people lack a title or formal deed for their homes, yet this presents no problem for the recognition of ownership under Puerto Rico laws. During the first four years after the disaster, this was consistently one of the main barriers for people to access much-needed federal emergency and recovery funds. When pushed to make these requirements more flexible, *Vivienda* often cited federal policy as the reason they could not. After four years of denials based on inability to meet this requirement (which was not required by federal disaster guidelines), the flexibility was announced by FEMA and the Puerto Rico Housing Department. However, no provision for addressing the hundreds of thousands of denials based on this have been announced.

²U.S. Government Accountability Office. (Feb. 5, 2020). [Puerto Rico Disaster Recovery: FEMA Actions Needed to Strengthen Project Cost Estimation and Awareness of Program Guidance](#).

REIMBURSEMENT AND MATCHING FUNDS

Most non-profits in Puerto Rico are small by U.S. standards and lack the financial capacity and cash flow required to participate in CDBG-DR or CDBG-MIT programs, like the [Whole Community Resilience Planning Program](#), with reimbursement mechanisms and or matching fund requirements in order to access federal assistance funds. HUD and PR Housing Department should waive reimbursement and matching funds requirements for local nonprofit organizations to facilitate maximum participation and get money to important stakeholders.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

The lack of transparency to ensure accountability is another issue. In July 2020, Hispanic Federation [advocated](#) for the creation of a R3 Program Dashboard in order to make data publicly available and shed much needed light on the federal contracting process and expenditures. In February 2021, the [R3 Transparency Portal](#) was created. Despite this tremendous step forward, more data and information should be readily available, such as: (1) the demographic impacts of the programs; (2) the number of houses with blue tarps that have been repaired or are still waiting to be repaired by municipality; and (3) the correlation between awarded contracts, subcontracts and the impacts of each program and investment by municipality and vulnerable community.

LACK OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Lack of effective public participation and community engagement from HUD and the PR Housing Department negatively impacts the sustainable recovery of the island. For example, the CDBG [Citizen Advisory Committee](#) (CAC) - one of the few spaces created for community groups, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to participate and provide input about community needs - is not yet fully active nor effective. Although it was reportedly reactivated on May 26, 2021, it took the Puerto Rico Housing Department over one year to even begin the nomination process for the committee's official members. Meanwhile, the [first substantial amendment](#) to the CDBG-MIT action plan is under review, with no opportunity to be evaluated by the CAC as required by HUD. The committee needs to be convened by *Vivienda* to start working immediately to comply with requirements for meaningful public participation in the reconstruction plans for Puerto Rico.

In addition, for no specific reason, the PR Housing Department or *Vivienda* is now limiting the CAC's jurisdiction to the CDBG-MIT action plan, leaving the CDBG-DR (\$8.2 billion) and the CDBG-DR Energy (\$1.9 billion) action plans without effective transparency and public participation mechanisms. This lack of effective participation in programs and guidelines has contributed to public controversies and even [legislative investigations](#) to [address the ineffectiveness of programs](#), such as the R3 Program and the [Regrow](#) program intended to promote and increase food security. Communities know their needs best and are the first to come to the aid of their members after a natural disaster. HUD should ensure *Vivienda* complies with robust public participation best practices in all the CDBG-DR and CDBG-MIT action plans.

“Recovery has been hampered in Puerto Rico by the previous federal administration’s politicized response and suffering has been compounded. The federal government has an obligation to assess what harms were caused by the federal response and work to mitigate them.”

2021 - The Biden Administration Charts a New Course for Reconstruction

Under President Biden's leadership, the federal government has eliminated many of the intentional bureaucratic barriers to access funds that were arbitrarily imposed by the previous administration and facilitated disbursement of needed funds. Nevertheless, more intentional efforts must be taken to effectively eliminate persistent systemic barriers. Current federal regulations, systems, and protocols create an undue burden for people that live in Puerto Rico to access federal aid. This makes it difficult for a long-lasting reconstruction process to actually happen. Still, it is important to recognize the following positive changes:

- On September 2, 2021, FEMA [relaxed the ownership documentation requirements](#) to increase access to assistance by disaster survivors across the country including in Puerto Rico. (This change was based on an executive order issued in January 2021, [Executive Order 13985](#), Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.)
- On July 22, 2021, the long-awaited reactivation of the [White House Puerto Rico Working Group](#) was welcomed as an important step to ensure interagency coordination of resources and technical assistance. However, the Working Group [must immediately engage](#) with Congress and Puerto Rico stakeholders, including community-based organizations that work directly with people most impacted to ensure disaster relief and other federal funds, including those intended for rebuilding the energy grid, are distributed in a timely, effective, and equitable manner.
- On April 19, 2021, HUD approved the current [CDBG-MIT Action Plan](#) to begin the development of guidelines to implement the programs under the \$8.2 billion CDBG-MIT funding.
- On April 19, 2021, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) removed the requirement of a [federal financial monitor](#) as well as other barriers to accessing \$8.2 billion in CDBG-DR funds.
- On February 2, 2021, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) finally began the process [of final approvals](#) of the Puerto Rico Housing Department's CDBG-MIT Action Plan, required prior to allocation of disaster funds, including the release of [\\$1.3 billion in CDBG-MIT funds](#) to Puerto Rico for critical disaster and recovery funds.
- On June 22, 2021, HUD published [Federal Register Vol. 86, No. 117](#) (June 22, 2021), 86 FR 32681, which governs the use of the \$1,932,347,000 allocated to Puerto Rico to enhance the electrical power system.
- On February 2, 2022, an [MOU](#) to achieve the reconstruction of the energy grid was signed between HUD, DOE, FEMA, and the local government. Within the MOU, the federal government recognizes [Puerto Rico's legislatively mandated public energy policy](#), to reach its ambitious climate goals, and promotes greater inclusion of Puerto Rico energy stakeholders in federal energy initiatives. The MOU also requires the development of the ["PR 100: Puerto Rico Grid Resilience and Transitions to 100% Renewable Energy Study,"](#) a multi-lab effort by the Dept. of Energy. This study is intended to perform a comprehensive analysis of stakeholder-driven pathways to Puerto Rico's renewable energy future. Unfortunately, the projected timeframe for the study is two years, during which time plans and approvals for projects to rebuild the energy grid will move forward without the benefit of the results of the study or the input of critical stakeholders in decision making.

Take Action! to Support Puerto Rico

Join the TakeAction4PR! Campaign

- Take the first step by signing up on the website <http://takeaction4pr.org> to stay in touch and get the latest news
- Download the TA4PR! Toolkit.
- Host a Community Forum or Teach-In for TakeActionforPuertoRico!
- Go to the TakeAction Center and send a tweet or email today [here](#).

Ways to Take Action in Support of Puerto Rico

Five years after the deadliest natural disaster in modern U.S. history, Puerto Rico still has not recovered. We need your help to ensure that every day counts and that your members of Congress and President Biden understand that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and deserve to be treated like other U.S. citizens anywhere in the country. Tell the President, your Senators, and U.S. Representatives that our community is not afraid to get involved and hold them accountable. ¡En la unión está la fuerza! Together we are strong and powerful!

- Town Halls.** Attend your Member of Congress' Town Hall and ask questions about their role in Puerto Rico's recovery efforts or organize your own!
 - Check [here](#) to see if your member is hosting a Town Hall.
 - Make the most of your time and the biggest impact for your efforts with this Guide to Town Halls ([Indivisible](#)).
 - Use TA4PR Policy Asks [here](#).
- Congressional Call-In Day.** Organize a Congressional Call-In Day on Sept 20th, and on the 20th of each month, with your friends and neighbors to let them know their constituents care about Puerto Rico.
 - Call 888-724-8791 to be connected to your representative to remind your elected officials that you care about Puerto Rico.
 - Calls to congressional offices are usually short and sweet, so you have to be prepared with your topline message. Go to the [TA4PR! Action Center](#) to review current asks or see sample script below.
- In-District Meetings.** Call your Member of Congress/ Senator's local district office to request a meeting to go in and talk about Puerto Rico. Let them know that their constituents care about Puerto Rico. Click [here](#) to find your Member of Congress' local district office. Click [here](#) to find the nearest state office of your Senators. Refer to the talking points in this toolkit to guide your conversation with your congressional office. Ask your member to submit an "Extension of Remarks" regarding his or her support for Puerto Rico (an "[Extension of Remarks](#)" means your Member of Congress will make a statement for the Congressional Record about your cause or organization.)
- Proclamations.** Secure a proclamation from your state or local elected official(s) declaring "We Are Puerto Rico Day." Be sure to send out a press release about it!
- Tweet-a-Thon or Twitter Town Hall.** If you like to tweet, do your own Congressional Tweet-a-thon on Sept 20th, the 20th of each month, or any day to let Congress know that people have not forgotten about Puerto Rico!
- Op-ed or Letter to the Editor.** Write an op-ed or Letter to the Editor for your local paper or website.
- Stay Informed.** TEXT "TakeAction4PR" to 40649 to stay updated about ways you can help Puerto Rico.
- Support a Non-Profit Organization in Puerto Rico.** There are many organizations doing extraordinary work supporting communities on the island since before Hurricane Maria. To learn more, please go to: www.takeaction4pr.org

PHONE SCRIPT FOR CONGRESSIONAL CALL-IN DAY

Call your Member of [Congress](#) and [Senators](#), and ask to speak to the staffer in charge of Puerto Rico or emergency preparedness. When you call, it's very important that you say that you are a constituent and that you take down the name, email, and title of the person you spoke with. You will stay in touch with this person and this will be your point of contact as you develop your relationship with this office.

SAMPLE SCRIPT:

Hello, my name is XXXX, and I live in your District/State. I am calling on behalf of the thousands of Puerto Ricans who live in your district* and who have U.S. citizen relatives and friends living on the Island.

Can you tell me if your office supports ending systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico in all federal programs like SSI, Medicaid, and Food Stamps? Will you support legislation such as the Territorial Equity Act of 2021 ([H.R. 2713](#) & [S. 1228](#))? OR Can you tell me what steps your office has taken to help rebuild and secure a vibrant Puerto Rico?

** NOTE: Use this [link](#) for the exact number of Puerto Ricans who live in your congressional district. NOTE: Do not use your zip code - use the drop-down menu to select your district to find demographic information for that district.*



Coalition Partners*

- 100 Hispanic Women
- Abrazo Boricua Coalition
- Afro Latin Jazz Alliance
- Aid for AIDS
- Alianza Americas
- American Federation Teachers
- American GI Forum
- Americas for Conversation + Arts
- Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services
- ARTE
- Asian American Federation
- Asian American Business Development Center
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice/Asian Law Caucus
- ASPIRA National
- ASPIRA of New York, Inc.
- Bienestar Human Services
- Boundless Theatre Company
- Bridgeport Caribe Youth League
- Calpulli Mexican Dance Company
- Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
- Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education
- Catholic Network. US
- Center for Latino Progress CPRF
- Center for Puerto Rican Studies
- Centro Civico de Amsterdam
- Chemical Abuse Services Agency, Inc.
- Churches United for Fair Housing
- Circulo de la Hispanidad
- Clarita's House Outreach Ministry, Inc.
- Coalicion de Lideres Latinos
- Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
- Consumer Credit Counseling Service/Florida Consumer
- Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
- Community Association of Progressive Dominicans
- Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
- COPAY, Inc.
- District Council 37
- Dominican Women's Development Center
- Dominicanos USA
- Dominico-American Society of Queens
- EarthJustice
- El Puente
- Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.
- Faith in Florida
- Farmworker Justice
- Fifth Avenue Committee
- Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials
- Haitian Women of Miami (FAMN, Inc.)
- Hispanic Alliance of Southeastern Connecticut
- Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury
- Hispanic Counseling Center
- Hispanic Federation
- Hispanic Health Council
- Hispanic Health Initiatives, Inc.
- Hispanics in Philanthropy
- Hispanos Unidos de Buffalo
- I Challenge Myself
- Ibero-American Action League
- Iniciativa Accion Puertorriqueña
- Institute for Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly
- Justice Shall be For All
- La Casa de Don Pedro
- Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
- Latino Commission on AIDS
- Latino Community Foundation
- Latino Community Fund Georgia
- Latino Community Fund Washington State
- Latino Community Services, Inc.
- LatinoJustice PRLDEF
- Latino U College Access
- Loisaida, Inc.
- Make the Road New York
- Mercy Center
- Mi Familia Vota
- Ministerio En Jehová Serán Provistos
- Mision Boricua
- Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs
- National Day Laborer Organizing Network
- National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
- National Hispanic Medical Association
- National Immigration Law Center
- National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
- National Latina/o Psychological Association
- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture
- National Puerto Rican Agenda
- National Puerto Rico Day Parade
- New Haven for Puerto Rico
- New York Council on Adoptable Children
- New York Urban League
- Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance
- Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights
- Operation Exodus Inner City
- Organize Florida
- Oxfam America
- People's Theatre Project
- Pregones Theater PRTT
- Presente.org
- Puerto Rico Action Initiative
- R.A.I.N. Total Care, Inc.
- Refugees International
- Repertorio Español
- San Juan Center Inc.
- Ser Familia, Inc.
- Southside United HDFC – Los Sures
- Spanish Community of Wallingford
- Spanish Speaking Elderly Council
- St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
- St. Simon of Stock and St. Joseph Church
- Tantai Teatro
- Teatro Circulo
- Thalia Spanish Theatre Inc.
- Transdiaspora Network
- Union of Concerned Scientists
- Unites States Hispanic Leadership Institute
- United We Dream
- Violence Intervention Program
- Vision Urbana, Inc.
- VOCES Latinas
- Zone 126

*List in formation



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