



# Legislation Your Member of Congress Should Support in 2021

**O**n Sept. 20th, 2017, Puerto Rico will commemorate four years since Hurricane Maria devastated the island. Island residents, exhausted from four years of repeated hardship including floods, severe earthquakes, rising unemployment, austerity, 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 withheld disaster relief and recovery funds that hampered the island recovery process.** Recovery was hampered 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 poor federal response and work to mitigate them. Our 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.

Now, under the Biden administration, Puerto Rico faces a new set of challenges and uncertainties, as the federal government decides the future of Puerto Rico in a series of decisions that fall into the hands of the three branches of government.

This document provides you with a series of bills being considered in Congress that we support because of their meaningful impact on Puerto Rico. They range from ensuring Puerto Rico receives equitable treatment in federal programs intended to support the most vulnerable residents, to providing assistance to address climate challenges. The overwhelming majority of bills introduced in the previous congress to provide equity to Puerto Rico were never even presented for votes.

While the island was still waiting for federal aid for Maria, 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](#).

**To date, Congress has not appropriated any disaster funds to help Puerto Rico address the resulting damage from the 2020 earthquakes.**

You will also find non-Puerto Rico-specific bills critical to moving the entire country forward that Hispanic Federation hopes will make it to the President's desk, such as the [Build Back Better](#) legislation package and the bipartisan [Infrastructure and Jobs Act](#). Our focus also needs to be on making sure that Puerto Rico is treated equitably in these massive and historic bills.

## **CONGRESS MUST END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PUERTO RICO IN FEDERAL FUNDING**

The federal government [has discriminated against the US citizens](#) of 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, only available to Puerto Rican families with at least three children), among others, since it forcibly acquired the island as a "territory" in 1898.

The lack of parity in funding for federal benefit programs, especially those designed to alleviate poverty ongoing discrimination has worsened the economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities in the island. This [unconstitutional treatment](#) is one of the main causes of Puerto Rico's current economic crisis and contributed to the island's high poverty levels.

Congress and the Biden administration have equal responsibility in guaranteeing Puerto Rico is treated with dignity and that the systemic discrimination against the residents of Puerto Rico comes to an end. As President Biden's first year in office comes to an end, his administration continues to push forward his legislative agenda to strengthen the country's economy and infrastructure. Puerto Rico must be treated equitably in that agenda.

**JOIN US IN TELLING CONGRESS TO PASS THESE BILLS**

Below you will find thirteen bills being considered in Congress that we urge your Member of Congress to support because of the meaningful impact they would have in Puerto Rico by providing the necessary funding and programs to help Puerto Rico Build Back Better. Many of these provisions could and should be considered for inclusion in the [budget reconciliation package](#) currently being considered in Congress.

You will also find non-Puerto Rico-specific bills that we hope will make it to the President's desk, such as the Build Back Better reconciliation package and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act which both have important provisions for Puerto Rico. However, we must insist that Congress treat Puerto Rico equitably in massive reconciliation initiatives like Build Back Better that present historic opportunities to make generational change.

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# Legislation Your Member of Congress Should Support in 2021

**Build Back Better Act (S. Con Res. 14 & H. Res. 601)** [Build Back Better](#) legislation would create jobs, cut taxes and lower childcare and healthcare costs for working families across the country, including in Puerto Rico. Tell Congress to pass this bill by taking action [here](#).

**Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R.3684)** The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act advances justice for communities on the frontlines of climate change - including Puerto Ricans on the island, people of color, and low-income families in America. This bill would [allocate approximately 2.2 billion dollars to Puerto Rico](#) to invest over the next five years in repairing roads, bridges, improving high-speed internet and public transportation, and creating thousands of good-paying jobs on the island.

**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. This bill would help Puerto Rico, and all the territories, gain more equitable access to federal programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and popular tax credits. Territorial residents are currently treated as second-class citizens under these programs which is not only morally wrong, it 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](#), this bill will end discrimination against residents in Puerto Rico on Medicaid, SSI, and SNAP programs. The House bill was introduced on April 20 2021. It has three co-sponsors: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Richie Torres (D-NY). No further action has been taken. The Senate bill was introduced on April 20, 2021. The bill has two co-sponsors: Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Edward Markey (D-MA). It was read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance. No further action has been taken.

## HEALTHCARE

### [Insular Area Medicaid Parity Act \(H.R.265\)](#)

This Insular Area Medicaid Parity Act [introduced](#) by Rep. Sablan (D-MP-At Large) would bring equitable treatment for U.S. territories by eliminating Medicaid capped block grants that do not respond to need beginning in FY2021. Unlike all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico [is not guaranteed a certain percentage of Medicaid resources](#) in the federal government's annual budget. Instead, Congress determines Medicaid funding that in the past has lasted anywhere from two years to seven years. Failure to secure additional funding to address the next "Medicaid cliff" on October 1, 2021, would likely have catastrophic consequences for the island's teetering health care system. The bill would prevent U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico, from the [85% to 90%](#) cut in Medicaid schedule, avoiding the so-called "Medicaid cliff" in October of 2022. Without legislation to address this discriminatory funding in basic health care services, discrimination on Puerto Rico. The bill was introduced on January 11, 2021, it was referred to the House Subcommittee on Health on February 2, 2021. The bill has [74 co-sponsors](#).

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

The Territories Health Equity Act of 2021 was [introduced](#) by Del. Plaskett (D-VI) in May 2021 with eighteen cosponsors, including Rep. Velázquez (D-NY), Rep. Soto (D-FL), Rep. Torres (D-NY), and Rep. González (R-PR-At Large). The bill would eliminate the annual federal Medicaid funding cap that limits the Medicaid funding in Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories can receive. It would also increase the federal matching rate (FMAP), and provide increased funding to provide prescription drugs to low-income seniors, and update hospital reimbursement rates. On May 20, 2021, H.R. 3434 was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Ways and Means. This bill has [18 co-sponsors](#).

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

The Supporting Medicaid in the U.S. Territories Act of 2021 was a [bipartisan measure](#) introduced by Rep. 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 medical assistance percentage and cap amount for U.S. territories. In addition, this bill would also increase the cap amount in the Covid-19 response. On July 21, 2021, H.R. 4406 was marked up in the Committee on Energy and Commerce and passed with a majority vote. H.R. 4406 has 33 co-sponsors. See *Hispanic Federation statement* [here](#).

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

Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY) [re-introduced](#) the Puerto Rico Health Care Fairness m Accountability, and Beneficiary Access Act of 2021 to offer both a short-term and long-term fix to Puerto Rico's Medicaid funding gap. This bill would address the immediate shortfall ("Medicaid cliff") and, at last, provide a path for Puerto Rico to be treated equitably when it comes to health care for low income people. If passed, the bill would provide \$15.1 billion in federal funding to allow the federal government to match 83% of the island's Medicaid program starting in 2022. After 2024, Puerto Rico would begin a 10-year transition period where the island would receive the same financial treatment in the Medicaid program as the states while also requiring Puerto Rico to cover mandatory benefits that are currently not covered. H.R. 1722 was introduced on March 9, 2021, and referred to the Subcommittee on Health. Co-sponsors to this bill include 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 Commission Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon (R-PR-At Large).

## NUTRITION ASSISTANCE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

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

Rep. 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 Gillibrand (D-NY), Sanders (D-VT), Booker (D-NJ), Padilla (D-CA), and 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 American citizens residing in Puerto Rico for nearly 40 years and it must end. Introduced on June 23, 2021. S. 2192 was read twice and referred to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. It 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). On July 28, 2021, H.R. 4077 was referred to the House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations. H.R. 4077 has [91 co-sponsors](#). See the fact sheet [here](#).

## HOUSING

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

This bill was introduced on July 16, 2021, by Rep. 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. The bill has [72 co-sponsors](#). **Portions of the package are currently being negotiated for inclusion in the Build Back Better reconciliation package.**

## CLIMATE

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

The Insular Area Climate Change Act was introduced in both chambers of Congress by Sen. Melendez (D-NJ) and Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) [in the Senate](#) on August 4, 2021 and by Rep. 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 planning, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience efforts. On July 14, 2021, H.R. 2780 passed the House Natural Resources Committee and is currently awaiting a house floor vote. H.R. 2780 co-sponsors include Del. Gregorio Kilili 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. Richie Torres (D-NY), Rep. Melanie Ann Stansbury (D-NM), Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO). S. 2613 was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. 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. 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 Gonzalez-Colon (R-PR-At Large). **These provisions are currently being negotiated for inclusion in the Build Back Better Act.**

### [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 [introduced](#) by Rep. 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. Additional co-sponsors include Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Albio Sires (D-NJ), Rep. Val Butler Demings (D-FL), Rep. Richie Torres (D-NY), Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI-At Large), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), and Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon (R-PR-At Large). 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.

### PROMESA

#### [Puerto Rico Recovery Accuracy in Disclosures Act of 2021 or PRADA \(S.375 & H.R.1192\)](#)

This Puerto Rico Recovery Accuracy in Disclosures Act of 2021 or PRADA was [reintroduced](#) by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY) in February 2021, which requires much needed transparency to disclose conflicts of interest related to people employed by the Federal Oversight Management Board. It requires professionals employed in debt adjustment cases involving Puerto Rico to file verified statements disclosing their connections with the debtor, creditors, and other interested parties before seeking compensation for their services. The bill also imposes requirements on the payment of compensation to professional persons employed in voluntary cases commenced under title III of the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act (commonly known as "PROMESA"). S. 375 is co-sponsored by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR). H.R. 1192 is co-sponsored by Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI), Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Eric Swalwell (D-CA), and Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon (R-PR-At Large). On July 29, 2021, S. 375 and H.R. 1192 were both heard in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. No further action has been taken.

You can go [here](#) to see the legislation we supported in the 116th Congress.