

Virtual Member Day Testimony
FY2021 Appropriations Bills
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón of Puerto Rico
Tuesday, June 23, 2020

Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Puerto Rico's priorities for the FY21 Appropriations bills.

Earlier this year, I appeared before most of your Subcommittees to discuss in detail these requests, in addition to the several programs I am also supporting.

I will briefly mention some of these.

First, I'm requesting that the Committee increase the Nutrition Assistance Program block grant for Puerto Rico. This would allow us to increase benefit levels to the 1.4 million participants on the Island, whose benefits are drastically below the national average under SNAP.

Second, for the U.S. Army Corps, I'm requesting additional resources to help advance projects like the Rio Guayanilla and Rio Grande de Loiza projects, among others, which received partial supplemental funding in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. I am also asking for an increase in the number of new construction starts to no less than 8, and that at least 4 be for Ecosystem Restoration Projects. This will better position projects already authorized by Congress, including the Caño Martín Peña Ecosystem Restoration Project in San Juan.

Third, I'm requesting language encouraging the Executive Branch to fully utilize the Defense Production Act to increase domestic supply and capacity of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies produced in the U.S. In Puerto Rico we already have the infrastructure for these industries and a skilled workforce that stands ready to ramp up production and help secure our national supply chain.

I also ask the Committee to support the Coast Guard's request for \$29.2 million to transition Air Station Borinquen in Aguadilla from MH-65 to MH-60 helicopters. This will increase Coast Guard capabilities in the Caribbean, providing critical resources to combat transnational criminal organizations that threaten our national security.

I'm requesting language directing FEMA to engage with local authorities in Puerto Rico, including municipalities still recovering from the 2017 hurricanes and 2020 earthquakes, to achieve a prompt disbursement of Public Assistance payments, reimbursements for the immediate response categories, and facilitate the start and completion of permanent work projects.

Lastly, I ask the Committee to reject the Forest Service's proposed closure of the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, headquartered in Puerto Rico, that has been vital in advancing our knowledge of tropical ecosystems at the local, national, and international levels.

Thank you.