

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

February 8, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Shelby, Chairman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger,

We are writing to request an additional \$1 billion in nutrition assistance in the Fiscal Year 2022 final appropriations package to support nutrition benefits for the residents of Puerto Rico, and ask that the funds be available until September 30, 2023. We are committed to the long-term recovery of Puerto Rico and to supporting critical initiatives and services on the Island. Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, Puerto Rico experienced high unemployment and, combined with the impact of COVID-19, individuals and families faced heightened and unprecedented levels of food insecurity. Since 2020, both the local and global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the cost of groceries and other goods for individuals and families in Puerto Rico. Since Puerto Rico imports more than 75 percent of its food supply from the states, the supply chain crisis affecting global and United States manufacturing, distribution, and agricultural sectors has exacerbated nutrition challenges that Puerto Ricans faced before the pandemic.

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 Americans, increasing food insecurity during times of great need. In 1981, the United States legislated Puerto Rico's participation in the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) through a capped block grant that does not fluctuate or respond to need. While the recent change to the USDA Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) increased the Puerto Rico nutrition block grant, it still did not create parity with the states or other territories like Guam or the U.S Virgin Islands (USVI) who participate in SNAP. The NAP block grant is not need-based and, under the new TFP guidelines, Puerto Rico benefit levels continue to be significantly lower than SNAP benefits provided in the fifty states, Guam, and USVI.

The primary recipients of NAP benefits in Puerto Rico are children (22 percent), the elderly (26 percent), and the disabled (6 percent) - highly vulnerable populations. Since March 2020, the onset of the pandemic, Puerto Rico has experienced an increase of 250,000 NAP beneficiaries. In February 2021, Congress enacted the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which allocated an additional \$966M in nutrition aid to Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico's federal block grant currently stands at \$2.5 billion given the recent adjustments to the Thrifty Food Plan in October 2021, which added \$463M to the capped block grant. The ARPA funds have allowed Puerto Rico to supplement the current block grant of \$2.5B, but the additional funding will be expended by June 2022. Even with both the NAP block grant and ARPA funding, Puerto Rico provides maximum monthly household benefits that are on average 22.5 percent lower than those in the continental United States and the District of Columbia. Without an additional \$1 billion in NAP funding, the projected disparity between the maximum SNAP benefits in the continental United States and the District of Columbia versus Puerto Rico NAP benefits increases to 44 percent. The gap in the maximum benefits is more significant when comparing Puerto Rico's benefits to those in the United States Virgin Islands and Guam. In USVI, the current maximum monthly benefits are 39 percent higher, and in Guam, the benefits are 46 percent higher than in Puerto Rico.

Under SNAP, a single-person household can receive a maximum benefit of \$250 per month, while in Puerto Rico, the same household maximum benefit would be \$140 under NAP starting in July 2022. To avoid drastic benefit losses for its citizens, \$1 billion in additional NAP funding is needed to supplement the block grant. With the additional funds, the Puerto Rico government could extend the current level of household benefits through September 2023. Therefore, we ask for this funding in any FY22 final funding package.

As Americans, Puerto Ricans deserve urgent and equitable funding and should not be subject to fewer benefits solely based on residency. With rising food insecurity and the lack of funding parity, we must act now to prevent a benefits cliff for Americans residing on the Island.

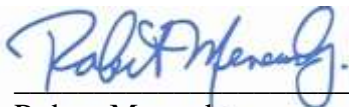
Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Nydia Velázquez  
Member of Congress



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



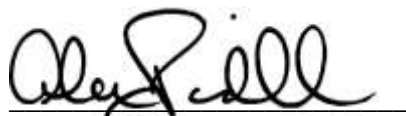
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján  
United States Senator



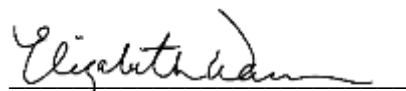
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



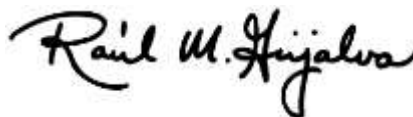
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress