

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1529 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 225-2615 FAX: (202) 225-2154

SAN JUAN OFFICE:
157 AVENIDA DE LA CONSTITUCIÓN
ANTIGUO EDIFICIO DE MEDICINA TROPICAL
SEGUNDO PISO
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO 00901
(787) 723-6333 FAX: (787) 729-7738

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5400

December 5, 2018

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
H-305- The Capitol
Washington, DC


The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128- The Capitol
Washington, DC

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128- The Capitol
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy:

The following is to respectfully request that you consider including language for stabilizing Puerto Rico's health care industry, as well as continued nutritional assistance, as part of any upcoming disaster supplemental appropriations bill or government funding package to mitigate natural disasters in 2018. As you are aware, the island continues to struggle with recovery efforts due to Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Hence, bolstering health care services and ensuring proper financial assistance are critical to continue ongoing recovery efforts and further stabilizing the island.



Puerto Rico's health care infrastructure had multiple challenges prior to the hurricanes. Unlike the mainland, the majority of Medicare beneficiaries with Medicare Part A and B in Puerto Rico receive their care through local Medicare Advantage (MA) Plans. However, because Medicare is severely underfunded, it pays only 57% of the US mainland average. Consequently, the average MA base payment rate on the island is drastically below the rates of mainland states and neighboring territories, like the US Virgin Islands.

The hurricanes unmasked and further exacerbated a longstanding problem of unequitable and chronic underfunding, which caused an accelerated exodus of patients and medical providers. To seek remedial action, I introduced H.R. 6809, the Puerto Rico Integrity in Medicare Advantage Act. Hence, since no recovery effort will be entirely successful without a robust health care sector, I respectfully urge your consideration to

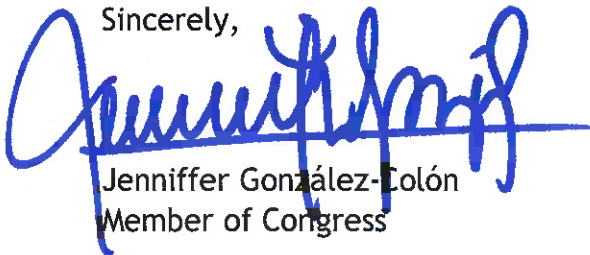
include H.R. 6809 as part of any upcoming funding package. I have attached a copy of the bill for your review and consideration.

Additionally, I would also like to address growing concerns regarding nutritional assistance in Puerto Rico. As you might be aware, the island does not participate in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), like the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the US Virgin Islands. Instead, we have the Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP), which consists of a capped block grant that is funded every year. After Hurricane Maria, Congress authorized an increase of \$1.27 billion for NAP, which allowed the Government of Puerto Rico to increase the amount of funding to those affected, as well as enroll new participants. The increase in participants that followed, close to 153,000 new beneficiaries according to the Government of Puerto Rico, made it obvious that maintaining a similar amount of funding is imperative as recovery efforts continue underway.

In attempting to secure current level of funding, which includes the annual NAP allotment in addition to the \$1.27 billion in supplemental funds, I sought to include an amendment to the Farm Bill that would have authorized additional funding for FY20 and FY21. Similarly, the Governor of Puerto Rico recently signed a letter sent to House and Senate Leadership that requests \$600 million for FY19. If funding is not extended, Puerto Rico will experience a NAP-related cliff in March 2019 and the Government in Puerto Rico will be forced to dismiss new NAP participants. Both my efforts to amend the Farm Bill and his letter demonstrate that the need for additional nutritional assistance is still present. I fully support the Governor's request and respectfully urge you to consider including this request for the people of the island as upcoming government funding packages move forward.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office should you need anything else regarding these requests.

Sincerely,



Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress