

# COALITION FOR FOOD SECURITY ✦ PUERTO RICO

July 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
House Republican Leader  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Democratic Leader  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Schumer, and Republican Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico and the undersigned organizations, we are writing with an urgent request concerning Puerto Rico's NAP enrollment and funding during the COVID-19 pandemic. Puerto Rico is in dire need of NAP funding in the next COVID-19 supplemental, funding which will be necessary to meet the ongoing nutritional needs of the island and prevent a funding cliff on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

As expected, Puerto Rico has experienced a dramatic increase in food insecurity resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increase in applications for NAP. As you may be aware, due to the nature of the capped federal block grant, Puerto Rico is unable to respond to increased need unless a direct appropriation is provided by Congress. As such, Puerto Rico is nearing the end of the emergency appropriation provided in the previous COVID-19 supplementals, and without a further appropriation from Congress, they will expend COVID-19 NAP funds by July 31, 2020 – which is just a few short weeks away.

Puerto Rico's economic challenges continue to increase due to financial pressures, and the harmful effects of hurricanes Maria and Irma, ongoing earthquakes, and the Coronavirus pandemic. These catastrophic circumstances have created higher levels of poverty, unemployment and business closures in Puerto Rico thus exacerbating food insecurity and increased demand for nutrition aid. Presently, Puerto Rico has the highest unemployment rate among the states and territories at 23% with one of the largest populations living below the poverty line, at nearly 45%.

With the current beneficiary level of 1.477 million participants, NAP expenditures are \$264M per month. Unfortunately, as of August 1<sup>st</sup>, because COVID-19 emergency NAP funding will be exhausted, the primary funding available is the primary base block grant, which provides approximately \$158 million per month in funding. Therefore, to meet the increased needs on the island and not be forced to reduce enrollment or significantly reduce benefit levels, Puerto Rico will need at least an additional \$103 million per month as an emergency appropriation which totals \$1.236 billion for a 12-month period to augment the base block grant.

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Since 1982, Puerto Rico has been denied equitable support for nutrition benefits for people residing on the island through exclusion from the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The current capped federal block grant underfunds and limits Puerto Rico's access to critical SNAP minimum benefit levels, and resources, including D-SNAP and emergency Pandemic EBT funding. Nutrition aid programs are combating hunger among the most vulnerable populations on the island, over 51% of beneficiaries are children and elderly. For the first time, working parents have had to resort to food banks to feed their children.

Since the COVID-19 crisis, over 36,000 additional children have been enrolled in the program. Without additional COVID-19 funding, a recent study by the Puerto Rico Youth Development Institute estimated that the percent of children living in extreme poverty is likely to increase from 58 percent to a staggering 65 percent this year.

The food insecurity and hunger needs are acute for close to 1.5 million individuals and families living in Puerto Rico. We are asking Congress to act on the request for \$1.236B in additional nutrition aid during the next legislative session. We are available to further discuss the urgency of this matter.

Sincerely,

Alianza Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc.

Alianza for Progress

American Federation of Teachers

Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico

Coalition on Human Needs

Church World Service

Hispanic Federation

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Puerto Rican Agenda

Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

Power 4 Puerto Rico Coalition

RESULTS

The Jewish Federations of North America

Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico