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|  | **MEDIA RELEASE** |

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**COALITION FOR FOOD SECURITY PUERTO RICO AND HISPANIC FEDERATION**

**JOIN U.S. SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND IN CALLING FOR**

**PUERTO RICO’S INCLUSION IN SNAP**

***Joint Statement representing broad-based, multi-sectorial support***

***calls for Congressional Action in the 2023 Farm Bill***

***Visual Representations can be found*** [***here***](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1xz6Kh4p58pS6v6mgo3lYkj_q6QPdMd8R) ***Live streaming of the press conference can be found*** [***here***](https://www.facebook.com/SenKirstenGillibrand)

**WASHINGTON, DC**— Today, the Hispanic Federation and the Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico held a press conference in Washington, D.C., presenting a joint statement signed by over 200 national non-profits, agriculture advocates, businesses, trade associations, and religious groups calling on Congress to approve legislation to transition Puerto Rico into the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2023. With broad-based support, the statement addresses the inclusion of Puerto Rico’s transition legislation in the 2023 Farm Bill, which would provide people residing in the territory with equity to nutrition benefits offered in the states, Guam and USVI. The joint statement can [be found here](https://puertoricosnap.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/JOINT-STATEMENT-ON-TRANSITIONING-PUERTO-RICO-TO-SNAP.-FINAL.pdf).

Currently, Puerto Rico’s federal capped block grant, which is administered under the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), severely limits the island’s ability to respond to necessary changes. NAP has no equivalent to Disaster-SNAP, so disasters or emergencies require new and separate appropriations by Congress, which can take months. Since NAP is not need-based like SNAP, U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico receive uneven benefits as enrollment levels go up or down. Nearly one in three NAP households in Puerto Rico is a person aged 60 or older, and 56% of all households are people living alone. Families with children, older adults, children, the working poor, and persons with disabilities represent 80% of all NAP households.

The press conference was held at the Senate SWAMP, and speakers included U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand; Congresswoman Jenniffer González-Colón; Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, Lead Organizer, Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico; Frankie Miranda, President, and CEO, Hispanic Federation; Mari Jo Laborde, CEO, Banco de Alimentos de PR; Josh Protas, Vice President, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger; Guillermo Mena, Director, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators; and Luis D. Dávila, Executive Director, Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration.

“For more than forty years, Puerto Rico has been unfairly excluded from SNAP, which has resulted in billions of dollars in lost aid and reduced nutrition benefits for more than one million of Puerto Ricans,” **said Senator Gillibrand, member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.** “The bipartisan Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act would correct this injustice and enable Puerto Ricans to participate in SNAP, as well as to receive Disaster SNAP in the wake of natural disasters or emergencies. As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I am focused on including this critical legislation in this year’s Farm Bill, and I’m optimistic that we’ll get this done.”

“The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, plays a significant role in strengthening food security across the country. Unfortunately, Puerto Rico lacks access to SNAP and instead relies on the Nutrition Assistance Program, or NAP, which limits the assistance available to American citizens living on the Island, does not accommodate increases in demand, and delays disaster response. This is why I have introduced several pieces of legislation, most recently H.R. 253, the Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act, to secure a transition from NAP to SNAP, which is my top priority for the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill. I would like to thank the Coalition for Food Security, Puerto Rico, for their steadfast support of this issue, as well as all the stakeholders from different sectors that want to see this transition happen. I also thank Senator Gillibrand for introducing the Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act in the Senate,” **said Congresswoman Jenniffer González-Colón.**

“I am so proud to have worked with Senator Gillibrand, Congresswoman Alma Adams, Hispanic Federation, Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico, and the rest of my colleagues in Congress to include provisions to expand SNAP to the people of Puerto Rico,” **said Congresswoman Velázquez.** “Currently, Puerto Rico relies on the Nutrition Assistance Program, which is a capped block grant that does not increase to meet the needs of Puerto Ricans in the wake of disasters like Hurricane María or the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill provides a swift and long overdue transition to SNAP for Puerto Rico, giving the Island the tools it needs to combat food insecurity.”

**Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer** said, “Puerto Ricans are American citizens, not second-class citizens. They must have a seat at the table as Congress prepares to negotiate legislation that helps put food on the table for needy families. I stand with the Hispanic Federation and the Coalition for Food Security PR in their effort to ensure Puerto Rico can fully participate in SNAP and the people of Puerto Rico have access to the federal resources that they deserve.”

“The exclusion of Puerto Rico from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has never made sense and has made it harder for more than one million people in Puerto Rico to put food on the table for over forty years. Our brothers and sisters on the island should not be treated as second-class citizens, they are our fellow Americans and deserve access to the same nutrition assistance programs as the rest of the country, **noted Congressman Soto.** “The Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act is a bipartisan effort to right a wrong that has persisted for far too long and I am proud to co-sponsor this legislation.”

**Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, Lead Organizer, Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico,** stated, “Our Coalition has worked to ensure equity and fairness in the access to and availability of nutrition aid for Puerto Rico for five years. Every year, Democratic and Republican members of Congress have pointed to the Farm Bill as the appropriate legislative vehicle to address Puerto Rico’s inclusion in SNAP. Congress is now negotiating the Farm Bill, and we are calling on them to rightfully seize this opportunity to end discrimination against US citizens residing in Puerto Rico and grant them full participation in SNAP.”

**Frankie Miranda, President and CEO, Hispanic Federation,** said, “SNAP is the most critical anti-hunger program supporting the nutrition, health, and economic well-being of countless Americans. Yet, people living in Puerto Rico were excluded from the program over 40 years ago. With Puerto Rico’s exclusion from SNAP, low-income families, children, the elderly, and veterans experience even higher levels of nutrition insecurity and hunger. With inflation, food supply chain challenges, and increasing poverty, we cannot accept this inequality. Puerto Ricans and their families deserve the same safety net provided to all Americans. Congress must transition Puerto Rico to SNAP immediately!”

“The block-grant NAP program simply does not respond appropriately to the needs of Puerto Ricans facing food insecurity. While 60% of our population could qualify for SNAP assistance, only 30% receive NAP. Every day, families in Puerto Rico must choose between proper nutrition and other basic needs,” said **Mari Jo Laborde, Executive Director, Banco de Alimentos de Puerto Rico.** “This should not be acceptable to any family anywhere, but we see it daily in our work. After 5 years of continued natural disasters, it is more evident that the Island needs access to D-SNAP, so that families facing the aftermath of a disaster can have immediate access to emergency food and so they can focus on rebuilding their lives. Puerto Ricans, like every other US citizen, deserve access to SNAP.”

“All people deserve to be able to feed themselves and their families, and this must include the people of Puerto Rico, who have been ignored for far too long,” said **Josh Protas, Vice President of Public Policy, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger**. “In recent years, Puerto Ricans have weathered multiple overlapping crises, exacerbating already high rates of food insecurity caused by policies of territorial exceptionalism and unfair treatment by the federal government. MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger is committed to supporting and uplifting our partners in Puerto Rico, and we are proud to fight for the structural change needed to end hunger. The people of Puerto Rico are Americans, and they deserve the same access to critical nutrition assistance, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as everyone else. Both the Closing the Meal Gap Act and the Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act take important steps toward fixing this egregious problem, and we urge our leaders to act swiftly to enact these vital changes in the 2023 Farm Bill and support the transition from NAP to SNAP for the people of Puerto Rico.”

“Hispanic leaders from across the country are very concerned about Puerto Rico. That is why they approved a resolution asserting that residents of Puerto Rico, as Americans, deserve urgent and equitable funding for food and nutrition security through SNAP, the same as other Americans in other US states and territories. We will keep pushing for the equality Puerto Rico residents deserve,” noted **Guillermo L. Mena, Director of Legislation, Policy, and Advocacy, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators**.

**Luis D. Dávila, Executive Director, Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration**, commented,

“The exclusion of Puerto Rico from the SNAP program is not only unfair, but it also has real consequences for the people of Puerto Rico that, on too many occasions, must choose between their next meal or paying for their basic needs. To put it all into perspective, if families in Puerto Rico were allowed the same access to adequate nutrition assistance as in the states, they could better invest in their futures and contribute to the broader economy of our Nation.”

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*Created in 2018 to engage in nutrition aid efforts after Hurricanes Irma and María hit Puerto Rico, the Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico (CFSPR), along with more than 80 nonprofits, and businesses. trade associations and advocacy groups, now lead a bipartisan effort to advocate for Puerto Rico’s inclusion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and ensure greater food security on the island. For more information, visit* [*www.puertoricosnap.com*](http://www.puertoricosnap.com)*.*

*The mission of the Hispanic Federation is to empower and advance the Hispanic community. Hispanic Federation provides grants and services to a broad network of Latino non-profit agencies serving the most vulnerable members of the Hispanic community and advocates nationally on vital issues of education, health, immigration, civil rights, economic empowerment, civic engagement, and the environment. For more information, please visit* [www.HispanicFederation.org](http://www.hispanicfederation.org).