



PO Box 9024002 San Juan, P.R. 00902-4002  
Tel: (787) 919-7685, 7686 / Email: oficina@fedalcaldes.com

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

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House Committee on Natural Resources

Hon. Bruce Westerman, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Natural Resources

Hon. Joe Manchin, Chairman  
Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Hon. John Barrasso, Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Dear Chairman, Grijalva, Ranking Member, Westerman,  
Chairman, Manchin, Ranking Member, Barrasso:

As mayors from municipalities across Puerto Rico we write to express our strong support for H.R. 1522 & S. 780, the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act, and to urge the U.S. Congress to approve it as soon as possible.

We represent a wide range of municipalities, from Puerto Rico's largest urban centers in the San Juan metro area to rural municipalities in the heart of Puerto Rico's central mountain range. We represent coastal towns that thrive on tourism, towns with current and former military bases, from towns with significant agriculture production to towns with advanced industrial manufacturing.

While each of our municipalities brings its own unique identity and contribution, they all share a common challenge. Under the current territory status, we are unable to provide an equal quality of life to our residents or to generate as many opportunities for our local residents as cities and towns in the states.

The reason for this is simple. Under the current territory status, the federal government is able to discriminate against Puerto Rico in the laws, programs and policies that we live under every day. This creates an unequal playing field from which it is impossible for our cities and towns to ever reach our full potential, because we are always starting at a disadvantage.

The other reason is that under territory status we are denied the right to vote for President, denied any representation in the U.S. Senate, and have only one non-voting Resident Commissioner in the House to represent a population that would normally have approximately four voting Representatives. This gap in representation means we often have to depend on officials we have no role in electing, and are not accountable to us, to advocate for the needs and advance the priorities of our communities.

This combination of structural inequality and democratic deficit means that many of our most talented, hard-working and productive residents are being forced to seek equal opportunities and full voting rights only found in the states. This is tearing apart families and communities as people in Puerto Rico feel compelled to leave the island and move stateside to seek a brighter future. Data from the U.S. Census illustrates this starkly.

According to the latest numbers Puerto Rico's population declined 11.8% (approximately 440,000 residents) in the last decade. This is not only the worse populations loss of any jurisdiction in the entire U.S., but possibly in the whole Western Hemisphere.

The current territory status is literally robbing our towns and cities of their present and future, and voter in Puerto Rico have had enough. In 2012 and 2017, voters in Puerto Rico rejected the current territory status and favored statehood among the valid non-territory options. Then last November, to eliminate any remaining doubt on whether or not the majority of Puerto Rico's voters supported statehood, 52.5% voted "YES" to the island's immediate admission as a state of the Union. These voters are calling for equal rights, equal representation and equal opportunities to those of their fellow citizens in the states.

We understand that some members of congress personally oppose statehood and or represent constituents that favor independence for Puerto Rico. While we respect their right to their own opinions and those of their constituents who do not live on the island, we strongly oppose any effort to disregard the will of the majority of the actual voters that live in Puerto Rico. That is why we must also express our opposition to H.R. 2070 & S. 865, the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act.

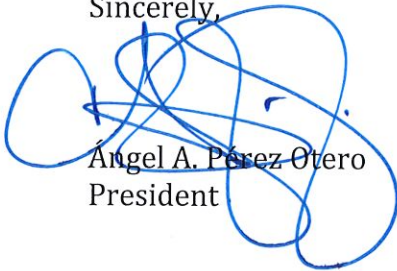
This bill engages in election denial by ignoring the will of the majority of Puerto Rico's voters in support of statehood and opens the door to an endless debate on an indefinite number of options, some of which are unconstitutional. That is completely reckless, and Congress must reject it.

As mayors, we have seen the issue of Puerto Rico's political status debated for decades and we know that until it is resolved we will never be able to offer our residents the rights, representation and opportunities they deserve and have earned after over 100 years of U.S. citizenship. Congress must not delay this debate any further with new commissions, false options or indefinite timelines

like in H.R. 2070 & S. 865. Instead, Congress must listen to the will of the majority of Puerto Rico's voters, extend a formal offer of admission to Puerto Rico as a state, and empower voters on the island to make the final decision to ratify our desire for full equality and democracy through statehood.

As local elected officials that see and work for the 3.2 million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico every day, we need you to take action now. We strongly urge Congress to support and pass the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act.

Sincerely,



Ángel A. Pérez Otero  
President