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Congress of the United States
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January 22, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

Congratulations on becoming the nation's 46th President. The country, my constituents, and I now look to you to bring this country together, to lead us once again out of an economic crisis and pandemic, and to create the next great resurgence of America as a global leader. As the sole Congressional representative for the 3.2 million Americans living in Puerto Rico, I want to raise with you some of the issues that must be addressed urgently, and for which I welcome the opportunity to work together for the benefit of our constituents.

In response to your televised address last Thursday night, I would like to count on your support to work together to correct the long-standing discriminatory policies which have engendered the serious economic disparities that have negatively affected the welfare of the Americans in Puerto Rico for decades, and which have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This public health emergency has shown us that securing the supply of pharmaceuticals, biologicals and medical devices and supplies on American soil is in the interest of our national security and health security. Puerto Rico is well positioned to help the U.S. close this gap immediately. Accordingly, to aid in the fight against COVID-19, we must make sure that any economic stimulus package includes provisions that will increase manufacturing of pharmaceutical and medical supply production; but we must make sure that these provisions will have a positive impact in local economies by tying any incentives to increased employment and capital investment. The Island has the capacity, workforce, and infrastructure to immediately ramp up domestic pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturing in order address this COVID-19 epidemic.

In your address, you asked Congress to approve \$350 billion in additional aid to state, local, and tribal governments. I ask that you ensure this funding includes funding for territories. Geographic

location or political status should not be a limitation on funding for the more than 4 million Americans who live in the five territories of the United States.

I would also like to highlight the need for additional funds for nutrition assistance in Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, as reflected in your American Rescue Plan. These three territories are currently excluded from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and chronically suffer from a limited availability of funds to combat food insecurity. In the case of Puerto Rico, I have had to turn to Congress on multiple occasions to request additional funds for the Island's Nutrition Assistance Program, or NAP, in response to recent natural disasters, starting with hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, and most recently with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. NAP has over 1.5 million participants, with the possibility of more joining due to the reductions in work hours or loss of employment that have resulted from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Typically, NAP is one of the first programs my constituents turn to in the wake of an emergency. However, limited funds resulting from the block grant challenges Puerto Rico's ability to accommodate additional participants. Hence, I fully support this portion of your proposal since it would provide the resources that we need to support the additional enrollment during these hard times. However, the only way to address the fundamental problems of NAP, is to fully transition into the SNAP program. I believe this should our ultimate goal and would allow Puerto Rico to offer steady and reliable nutrition assistance through an entitlement program.

I am optimistic of your plan to expand and increase the refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC) for the year and its increase to \$3,000 per child and \$3,600 per child under six years of age. However, in Puerto Rico, families are only able to benefit from this credit after the second child, thus making it unavailable for families with one or two children. I ask you to make the CTC fully applicable for families in Puerto Rico under the same conditions that it is applicable in the States and in the District of Columbia.

The CTC was designed to be a tool for low-income families or families who have experienced economic hardship to raise themselves out of poverty. Puerto Rico is the U.S. jurisdiction with the highest poverty rate, with 45% of the general population falling under the federal poverty line. This number doubles the highest poverty rate among the 50 states for the year 2014, which corresponds to Mississippi, with 19.8%. These numbers are more alarming among children and young people: 56.9% of them live in poverty and 39% of these in extreme poverty. According to the Census Bureau, Puerto Rico also has the lowest mean household income with \$19,775, compared to \$43,441 in the state of Mississippi, and \$61,372 nationally.

I also ask you to work with me to find a permanent funding solution for Puerto Rico's Medicaid program and end the disparate treatment in attending to the healthcare needs of the Americans living in the Island that this lack of adequate financing causes. Currently, our Medicaid program is subject to a yearly federal funding cap with severely limits the availability of the Medicaid programs to only the poorest of our residents (those with incomes below 40% of the Federal Poverty Level) and which provides for a standard of care well below that provided by Medicaid programs in the States and in the District of Colombia. After this fiscal year, federal financing of Puerto Rico's Medicaid program will revert to approximately \$350million a year for a program

with costs in excess of \$3billion a year, even with the limited healthcare it provides. Moreover, the federal matching assistance percentage (FMAP) will revert back from 76% for FY19-20 and FY20-21, to the statutorily-set default applicable to the territories of 55%, far below the 83% FMAP that Puerto Rico would be entitled to if the formula applicable to the States and the District of Columbia were applied to Puerto Rico. These limitations in federal funding— which are only applicable to the territories— are mainly responsible for the economic woes that Puerto Rico has suffered as a result of the unfair burden on the local government resources caused by the inadequate financing of the federal Medicaid program. While we need to work swiftly and decisively to avert the upcoming Medicaid cliff that will result from the expiration of the actual funding levels, our ultimate goal should be a permanent solution with a financing model equal to that of the States and the District of Columbia so that we can ensure adequate healthcare for all Americans, regardless of the place they live.

The need for continued adjustments to limited solutions in all these programs to benefit our working families in Puerto Rico is a direct consequence of the essential inequality of our territorial condition. Over three million American citizens, living on what is U.S. soil for purposes of birthright citizenship, remain under a discriminatory condition, subject to the laws, regulations, policies and decisions of the federal government while lacking a vote in the Congress or the Electoral College. Were we one of the states, Puerto Rico's citizens would not only participate of these programs as a matter of course, but the stability and security of a permanent political status would empower the island's economy to grow and prosper, lifting many out of their need.

On the same day of your election the people of Puerto Rico affirmed by a clear majority their choice to value their American citizenship and seek the fulfilment of its rights and duties as an equal part of our great union of states. On the day of your inauguration, members of our National Guard, who could not vote for their Commander in Chief, defended the capital city. We count on that you will commit your Administration to do justice and address this unfinished task.

As I previously stated, I trust that I can count on you to help me effect the changes and bring the equality that my constituents, as American, deserve. I remain available to discuss these and other issues impacting Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jenniffer González-Colón". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing "J" and "G".

Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress