



GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO

Department of Natural and Environmental Resources

STATEMENT BY

HON. RAFAEL MACHARGO

SECRETARY OF THE

PUERTO RICO DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL & NATURAL RESOURCES

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
HEARING ON DISCUSSION DRAFT H.R.____, "INSULAR AREA CLIMATE CHANGE ACT"

Thursday, March 4, 2021



Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the draft of the Insular Area Climate Change Act. My name is Rafael Machargo. I am the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico and President of the Puerto Rico Climate Change Experts and Advisory Committee (CEACC, by its Spanish acronym).

Created under Puerto Rico Act No. 33-2019 (Act 33), the CEACC's primary duty is to advise on the implementation of Puerto Rico's public policy on climate change and prepare the "*Plan for the Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience on Climate Change of Puerto Rico*." The CEACC is the official governmental organization for all climate change matters.

The CEACC, which I'm honored to preside, comprises nine members: three of them *ex officio* and six scientific and academic permanent experts, appointed by the Governor of Puerto Rico and confirmed by the Legislative Assembly. The permanent members are the following: Eng. Carl Alex Soderberg (former Director, Caribbean Division of the Environmental Protection Agency); meteorologist Ada Monzón (CEO of *Eco Exploratorio of Puerto Rico* and news communicator); climatologist Dr. Rafael Méndez Tejeda (Scientist and Dean of the University of Puerto Rico, Carolina campus); global renewable energy expert, Mr. Roy Charles Torbert (Director of Rocky Mountain Institute); expert in climate and public health, Dr. Pablo Méndez Lázaro (Scientist at the University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Department); and coastal oceanographer Dr. Maritza Barreto (Chair Coastal Research and Planning Institute of Puerto Rico and member of the American Shore and Beach Association Board of Directors). The Government's representatives are the Secretary of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce of Puerto Rico (DDEC), the President of the University of Puerto Rico, and the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico.

In the past few years, Puerto Rico has experienced the effects of severe weather. On September 20, 2017, Hurricane María, a powerful hurricane with sustained winds over 150 MPH, made direct landfall and bisected the entire Island. María caused widespread destruction and left flooding associated with over 40 inches of rainfall, major devastation of residential areas, roads, bridges, communication towers, and total failure of the electric grid infrastructure caused by the collapse of thousands of power lines and poles. Furthermore, the storm activated thousands of landslides registered in high altitude and steep-sloped

topographic areas, including the central cordillera region. NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information and the National Hurricane Center jointly classified Hurricane María as the United States' third-costliest tropical cyclone. Damage in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands totaled \$90 billion.

Climate change needs to be addressed urgently. For that matter, we strongly support Chairman Grijalva's proposed intentions to move forward with climate change issues on the U.S. Territories and the Freely Associate States. Although the CEACC will be submitting more specific comments on the newest draft version of the bill, our main recommendations are as follows:

- Title III: We recommend to appropriate funds to acquire an additional NEXRAD Doppler system. Given the catastrophic nature of tropical cyclones resulting from climate change, an additional NEXRAD Doppler system must be incorporated into the Islands' regime.
- Reevaluate the allocations amounts to be appropriated by Congress for the different programs.
- Add a section on Title V to include the following:

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Environmental Protection Agency will provide technical assistance to the Territories and the Free Associated States on adaptation and resilience to Climate Change impacts on water supply. The technical assistance will include, but will not be limited to, implementation of EPA's WaterSense water conservation program, wastewater reuse, rainfall harvesting, and reduction of portable water loss in the distribution system, protection of aquifer recharge areas, erosion control, among others."

- Title III, Section 302: The CEACC recommends including technical assistance on coastal erosion and flooding.
- Add a new Section for:

MITIGATION, ADAPTATION, AND RESILIENCE CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN

(a) One year after the enactment of this law, each Territory shall submit a Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience Plan

(b) Grants – FEMA will provide each Territory up to \$1,000,000 to develop a comprehensive Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Resilience Plan. The Plan will be submitted to the federal Task Force for approval. Once approved, each Territory will implement it according to the timetables included in the document. Federal grants to implement mitigation, adaptation, and resilience projects will be contingent on the approved plans.

Once again, we want to thank this Honorable Commission for the opportunity to present these preliminary comments and recommendations on the proposed bill, as further commentaries will be submitted in the proper time. The CEACC hopes that you find these useful and reiterate its commitment to support initiatives to address climate change,

Thank you.

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