

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 24, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Yarmuth  
Chairman, House Committee on the Budget  
204-E Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Chairman Yarmuth:

We are writing to urge you to include language relating to the Vieques Recovery and Redevelopment Act (H.R.1317/ S. 405) in the reconciliation instructions for the Fiscal Year 2022 budget resolution. This bipartisan and bicameral bill would provide a practical means of addressing the acute health crisis in Vieques, which is an unintended consequence of the decades of munitions testing that the military conducted on the island.<sup>1</sup>

As you know, the U.S. citizens of Vieques, Puerto Rico contributed to the national defense for over sixty years through the use of the island as a Navy training range. Unfortunately, the heavy metals in the bombs contaminated the local food supply. As a result, residents of Vieques have much higher incidences of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses. According to the University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Planning, the island of Vieques has a 269% higher rate of cancer, a 73% higher rate of heart disease, and 58% greater rate of diabetes than Puerto Rico. In addition, the Puerto Rico Bureau of Vital Statistics found that deaths on Vieques for liver disease are 95% higher and infant mortality was 55% higher than in Puerto Rico.

Further exacerbating the situation, Vieques also lacks adequate health care services due to the destruction of the only clinic on the island after Hurricane Maria in 2017. Most recently, a three-year-old Viequense suffered the consequences firsthand of this lack of an adequate healthcare center in the island-municipality.<sup>2</sup> After being treated at the provisional CDT health clinic in Vieques, the minor was referred to a hospital on the “big” (main) island. However, the child’s

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<sup>1</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2010/US/02/01/vieques.illness/index.html>

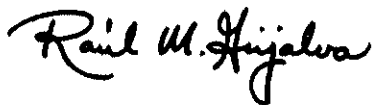
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/seguridad/notas/muere-un-bebe-en-vieques-mientras-intentaban-llevarlo-a-fajardo-a-ser-atendido>

condition worsened on the way to the main island, and he passed away. Last year, a 13-year-old also suffered the same fate due to the lack of a proper hospital in Vieques.

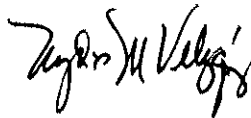
H.R.1317/S.405 would utilize the Judgment Fund, a unique fund not subject to the regular appropriations process. In essence, the bill would settle claims filed by the victims and municipality and provide them with modest compensation. The U.S. Attorney General would appoint a Special Master to administer awards from the Judgment Fund and ensure that claims are appropriately documented. The Special Master also would commission scientific research to determine the best strategies for addressing and resolving the environmental and health concerns that impact Vieques. Disbursements under the bill would be capped at \$1 billion.

As you recall, this bill garnered broad bicameral support was very nearly included in the COVID package last December. Thank you for providing this important piece of unfinished business with the priority attention it deserves.

Sincerely,



Raúl Grijalva  
Chairman  
House Natural Resources Committee



Nydia Velázquez  
Chairwoman  
House Small Business Committee



Bennie Thompson  
Chairman  
House Homeland Security Committee