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The Honorable Steny Hoyer
U.S. House Majority Leader
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Leader Hoyer:

Imagine trying to fight for self-determination with the deck stacked against you due to an anti-democratic process. Well Sir, this is exactly what is happening with the so-called consensus “Puerto Rico Status Act” currently considered by Congress. Denying the Puerto Rican and American peoples the right to open, Spanish accessible, and formal Congressional public hearings would tarnish the hard work you and other Congressional Members have put into solving this issue. In addition to not holding formal public hearings, many in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora in the United States are also alarmed at the lack of specificity in this bill regarding: 1) the scant details in the annexation (i.e., “statehood”) option, 2) lack of clarity on U.S. citizenship under free association, and 3) the imposition of unacceptable conditions under independence.

Like you, I fiercely agree that Puerto Rico needs to break the shackles of colonialism that, for more than a century, have caused so much harm. It is indeed a meaningful step forward that for the first time Congress admits to Puerto Rico being a colony of the United States. The path to move forward must be a truly democratic one, where people know exactly what they are voting for. Thus, it is important that the process be fully transparent, open, and democratic with crucial information available for all options, for Puerto Ricans to make a truly informed decision. If this is absent, Congress will be putting many of us in a position not to be able to support this bill as it stands.

If we take one step back, the Declaration of Independence states that we are all endowed by our Creator with certain “unalienable rights amongst which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Surely you believe that this principle is one of global application; thus, should Puerto Ricans not be free to pursue our happiness? **The more paramount question is can freedom be exercised when information is kept from those who need to make a crucial decision such as the future political relationship of Puerto Ricans with these United States?** Thus, when you vote, when your very future and existence are at stake, one must know exactly what one is voting for. Nothing should be loosely defined or left to interpretation. Simply put, people should know exactly what they are voting for. People must understand the ultimate implications of their vote.

I am sure you understand this, Congressman Hoyer. After all, it took Americans two years of debates, immortalized in the well-known Federalist Papers, to understand and decide the principles put forth in the Constitution that gave birth to the United States of America.

Therefore, it is surprising to see obvious deficiencies which must be corrected for this to be a truly decolonization process. Let me bring some of these to your attention:

1. **NO FORMAL CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS** – It is quite troublesome to hear that the Committee does not plan to hold formal Congressional, Spanish accessible, public hearings on such an important issue. **This is as undemocratic and un-American as can be.** Does Congress really believe that 124 years of colonialism can be dismissed with no formal Congressional hearings and with the bill in a language different to that used daily by those directly impacted?
2. **LACK OF CLEAR DEFINITION OF STATEHOOD** – While the contours of other options are defined in great detail, the bill simply defines statehood in essence as just as any of the existing 50 states. **This gives an unfair and unrealistic advantage to those in Puerto Rico who favor that option, for it allows them to craft a narrative which is quite distant from the impact annexation will have on everyday life in our country of Puerto Rico.** For example:
 - **Will Puerto Rico be allowed to keep its own Olympic team, separate from Team USA as it is now?** No other States do; however, the Resident Commissioner continues to affirm that Puerto Rico will be allowed to continue representing its own national team at the Olympics. I do not see Texas, Arizona or New York having their own Olympic teams, do you?
 - **Will schools continue to teach in Spanish with English as a second language?** Will we continue to conduct our governmental affairs in Spanish? Will the legal system continue to be in Spanish? Even though some stubbornly insist that this is something to be decided by each State, we continue to see States like Arizona and New Mexico, to mention a few, that had Congress approved enabling acts requiring the territories to conduct its public schooling in English and to require fluency in this language as a prerequisite for any state office as a condition of statehood. Is the United States prepared to express that it will become like Canada and allow Puerto Rico to be a Spanish-speaking State?

Leaving these questions unanswered will allow pro-statehood proponents to present to Puerto Ricans an option which can be separate but at the same time perceived as equal. Luring voters to favor an option with a fake narrative is unconscionable and perturbing. It is unimaginable that Congress would allow such a vote to go through without truth as the guiding principle. Not doing anything to clarify these important aspects of Puerto Rican life could be perceived as a way for Congress to favor statehood over the other options.

3. **CITIZENSHIP UNDER FREE ASSOCIATION** – Although an agreement has been reached regarding the at-birth U.S. citizenship under Free Association, we notice that treatment of Puerto Rico is unconstitutional. As you know, the proposed legislation states that citizenship is transmitted by just one parent. **In the case of this current legislation, Puerto Rico is treated differently and a different requirement, counter to the Constitution's equal protection clause, is imposed by establishing that two parents must be citizens for the at birth citizenship to be automatic.** We urge the Committee to rectify this situation so that justice prevails.
4. **INDEPENDENCE** – We note that under the Independence Status option the United States is imposing certain requirements for the new Constitution. **It seems unlikely that a free country would dictate terms for a newly free country's magna carta.** I'm sure you would agree with me that had England attempted to impose the terms of the 13 colonies' new constitution, this would have been unacceptable to the founding fathers. We thus urge these requirements to be stricken from the legislation.

Once again, like many Puerto Ricans, I believe the centenary problem of colonialism must end. However, it must end by making sure that people have clear options to make an informed decision, after having aired their opinions in a formal Congressional public hearing. I trust you will see to it that the shackles of colonialism are broken by the clear will of the Puerto Rican people based on facts and truth, not rushed processes nor ambiguous and manipulated language.

In opting to ignore these important concerns, Congressional leadership will make it highly difficult and nearly impossible for many Puerto Ricans and members of the Diaspora, like me, to support the bill in its current form.

We trust we can count on you in this historic moment.



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CC: U.S. House Natural Resources Committee Members

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY)

Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY)

