



# CONGRESSWOMAN JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN

PUERTO RICO - AT LARGE

**Statement for the Record on  
H.R. 7918, the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act of 2022  
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources  
Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón of Puerto Rico  
Thursday, December 8, 2022**

I want to thank Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman for including H.R. 7918, the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act, in today's markup.

This bipartisan legislation—introduced by Congressman Keating of Massachusetts, and which I cosponsored—would establish a new federal grant program at NOAA to support organizations that respond to and rehabilitate federally protected, endangered sea turtles.

All sea turtle species found in U.S. waters are currently listed as either threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. They face such threats as entanglements in fishing gear and other plastic and marine debris, boat strikes, and cold-stun events. These factors also contribute to the stranding of sea turtles along our coastlines.

Multiple organizations across the nation, including members of the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network, respond to these events and assist with recovery and rehabilitation efforts, in collaboration with federal, state, and private partners.

At least four of the seven species of sea turtles are found in Puerto Rico: the leatherback, the hawksbill, the green sea turtle, and the loggerhead. Entities such as the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and the Caribbean Stranding Network help rescue and rehabilitate stranded turtles found on our beaches. We also have sea turtle volunteer groups—commonly known in Spanish as *Grupos Tortugueros*—who collaborate with Island authorities to carry out activities to save these federally protected species.

However, although stranding response and rehabilitation is a critical component of sea turtle conservation efforts across the United States, available funding to support this important work is unfortunately inadequate.

H.R. 7918 would help address this by authorizing \$5 million annually to fund rescue, recovery, and research of sea turtles in the U.S. Specifically, organizations would be able to apply for grants to support the care, transportation, and treatment of stranded sea turtles; the release of rescued and recovered marine turtles; the collection of data for scientific research and better understanding of turtle health; and facility operation costs directly related to this work.

I want to again thank the Chair and Ranking Member for including the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act in today's agenda. I trust this bill will provide the necessary resources to strengthen ongoing efforts to recover, rehabilitate, and release sea turtles.

Thank you.