

Resident Commissioner Pablo José Hernández (PR-00)
Statement for the Record
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
December 4, 2025

Thank you to the Members and staff of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs for allowing me to submit these priorities. Over the past four months, I have convened a series of veterans' roundtables across my district, hearing firsthand the experiences, concerns, and priorities of those who have served our nation. Their message has been clear and compelling. In light of what I have heard, I respectfully urge your full consideration of the following request to strengthen the support available to veterans in Puerto Rico.

H.R.2632 - TRICARE Equality Act

H.R. 2632 - TRICARE Equality Act directs the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to improve TRICARE Prime access and travel benefits for Puerto Rico veterans. The bill also requires coordination between the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization Office and Puerto Rico's Department of Health to share health data.

TRICARE, the healthcare program that serves military personnel, retirees, and their families, is currently available in Puerto Rico through the TRICARE Overseas Program (TOP).

Approximately 38,000 individuals in Puerto Rico rely on TRICARE, including active-duty service members and their families, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and around 24,000 military retirees and their families. Under the TRICARE Area Office for Latin America and Canada, Puerto Rico offers several health plan options such as TRICARE Prime Remote, TRICARE Select, and TRICARE Reserve Select.

However, because Puerto Rico is excluded from the full TRICARE Prime network, beneficiaries on the island face significant barriers to accessing care. Many are forced to pay for services upfront and submit claims for reimbursement later, encountering gaps in access to specialty care that often require travel to the mainland and endure delays in receiving necessary treatments.

The TRICARE Equality Act addresses these disparities by directing the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to improve TRICARE Prime access and travel benefits for Puerto Rico's military community, ensuring they receive the same level of healthcare access as their counterparts on the mainland. It also requires the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization Office to coordinate with Puerto Rico's Department of Health to share health data and improve care delivery.

H.R. 6168 – Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act (H.R. 6168)

In addition to improving healthcare access, addressing food insecurity among veterans in Puerto Rico remains one of my top priorities. For this reason, I introduced H.R. 6168 - Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act, which would transition the island from its capped Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This transition would finally provide Puerto Rico's families and veterans with equitable benefits so they can put food on the table with dignity.

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Although these bills fall under the jurisdiction of the House Armed Services Committee and the Agriculture Committee, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support all efforts that strengthen care and reduce food insecurity for veterans in Puerto Rico. Our veterans deserve reliable, equitable access to the benefits they have earned. Thank you for your time and consideration.