

**Member Day Testimony**  
**FY2021 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill**  
**U.S. House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón**  
**Wednesday, February 26, 2020**

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for providing me an opportunity to testify on the FY 2021 Homeland Security appropriations bill.

Today, I would like to focus on the need to ensure the Department of Homeland Security has the necessary resources and assets to enhance border security operations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands—our Nation’s Caribbean border.

A well-coordinated approach to secure the U.S. homeland requires attention to the Caribbean. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have long been exploited by criminal organizations as a destination and transit zone for illegal drugs, which endangers the lives of Americans in the two territories and the mainland.

We are at the forefront of the Nation’s efforts to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations, and Congress should respond accordingly.

*U.S. Coast Guard*

The U.S. Coast Guard’s FY 2021 budget request includes two funding increases that would support this approach.

First, the Coast Guard is requesting an increase of \$29.2 million to transition Air Station Borinquen in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico from MH-65 to MH-60 helicopters. I strongly support this request and respectfully urge the Subcommittee to provide this increase in the upcoming Homeland Security appropriations bill.

MH-60 helicopters will improve border security mission effectiveness and search and rescue missions due to their greater capacity for people and equipment and their longer on-scene time. This is especially important in Air Station Borinquen's Area of Responsibility, where the large swathes of ocean between islands limit options for refueling.

With its increased range, the MH-60 will be able to reach and patrol international waterways and threat vectors that are currently unreachable by MH-65s. Transitioning Air Station Borinquen will thus be crucial to enhance Coast Guard capabilities in Puerto Rico, providing much-needed resources to combat criminal organizations who are exploiting the Caribbean to increase illicit smuggling activities into the U.S.

Additionally, the FY 2021 budget request includes a \$2.5 million increase to expand the Coast Guard's capacity to execute a multi-layered approach in the Western Hemisphere maritime transit zone. Per the budget request, this funding would increase the Coast Guard's capacity to counter Transnational Criminal Organizations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I therefore request that the Subcommittee similarly provide this increase in FY 2021.

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement – Homeland Security Investigations*

ICE-Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) also plays a crucial role in securing our Caribbean border. The agency is requesting \$400,000 to support the operations and maintenance of prior completed Tactical Communications site expansions in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Tactical Communications systems facilitate radio communication among Federal partners, public safety agencies, and state, local, tribal, and territorial stakeholders. The requested \$400,000 will support new infrastructure that will minimize redundancies and communications gaps that exist between DHS Components and other Federal, state, and local partners in the Northern Caribbean. Given how this would strengthen our security capabilities in the region, I respectfully request your support and include this funding increase.

*U.S. Customs and Border Protection*

I would also like to request robust funding for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine Operations—which support the operations and assets of the Caribbean Air and Marine Branch—and for U.S. Border Patrol—which supports the operations of the Ramey Border Patrol Sector in Puerto Rico, which is the only sector located outside the continental U.S.

Additionally, I am requesting that the Subcommittee maintain bill language allowing CBP to sustain or increase operations in Puerto Rico with appropriated funds, a provision that has been included in every enacted appropriations bill since FY 2015.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

I also urge the Subcommittee to provide robust funding for State Homeland Security Grants, Operation Stonegarden Grants, Port Security Grants, and Emergency Management Performance Grants, which provide critical resources to local law enforcement agencies in Puerto Rico.

Finally, I would like to request that the Subcommittee provide the \$1.7 million increase requested by FEMA in its FY 2021 budget request to renovate its Distribution Center in Puerto Rico.

This funding would support the renovation and installation of new racking, increasing capacity in the Distribution Center by 33% and enhancing FEMA's ability to provide lifesaving commodities and supplies in the event of a future disaster in the Caribbean.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and for the opportunity to testify.