



# CONGRESSWOMAN JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN

PUERTO RICO - AT LARGE

**Member Day Testimony**  
**FY2021 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill**  
**U.S. House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón**  
**Wednesday, March 4, 2020**

Chairman Serrano, Ranking Member Aderholt, and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for providing me an opportunity to testify on Puerto Rico's priorities for the FY 2021 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill.

*Federal Law Enforcement Resources in the U.S. Caribbean*

Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands—our Nation's Caribbean border—continue to face high levels of violent crime. In particular, the homicide rate in each jurisdiction is significantly higher than the national average. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting Program for 2018, Puerto Rico has a higher murder rate than any U.S. State, with 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

Law enforcement agencies report that approximately 60 percent of homicides committed on the Island are drug-related. As you are aware, transnational criminal organizations have long exploited Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as both a destination and a transit zone for illegal drugs, posing a threat to the lives of Americans in the two territories and the mainland.

Given these dire security conditions, I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to include language—just like it did last year—directing the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to prioritize law enforcement personnel and resources in the U.S. Caribbean, with a particular focus on initiatives to reduce drug-related crime.

Additionally, in order to ensure these efforts are successful, I am requesting robust funding for the FBI; the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); and the U.S. Attorneys. These DOJ components have been crucial in fighting crime in Puerto Rico and deserve Congress's support.

I also respectfully urge the Subcommittee to provide the highest possible level of funding for State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance programs. In particular, the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) Program, the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Hiring Program, the Project Safe Neighborhood Program, the Body Worn Camera and Bulletproof Vest Partnership Programs, and Violence Against Women Prevention and Prosecution Programs. Each year these grants provide much-needed resources for local law enforcement agencies in Puerto Rico, including for many of our municipalities.

### Puerto Rico's Inclusion in Federal Statistical Programs

The Subcommittee's support will also be crucial to ensure the U.S. Department of Commerce treats Puerto Rico equally under its statistical programs in FY 2021. As you are aware, the Island is excluded from a considerable number of federal surveys, which hampers efforts to evaluate our economy and our population's needs.

Therefore, I request that you appropriate the Bureau of Economic Analysis' (BEA) budget request of \$111.9 million, which includes funding to support the agency's ongoing efforts to produce annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics for Puerto Rico.

Additionally, I note that the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020* required the U.S. Census Bureau to submit a report containing an overall cost estimate and implementation plan for Puerto Rico's inclusion in additional surveys for which we are currently excluded. I urge that the Subcommittee evaluate this document once it's submitted and provide the necessary funding in the FY 2021 CJS Appropriations bill to ensure the Census can begin working on including the Island under these data products.

I also ask that the Subcommittee maintain language requiring the Census Bureau and BEA to work with the Government of Puerto Rico to identify alternative data sources to the Electronic Export Information (EEI) requirement. I strongly believe this requirement is a burden on interstate commerce and thus hampers efforts to grow our Island's economy. Moreover, it gives the wrong impression that Puerto Rico is a foreign jurisdiction, especially when EEI filings are not required for shipments between the several States.

I recently hosted a meeting in my office between the Census Bureau, BEA, and the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to begin discussions on this topic. I'm glad that a working group was established to find and develop an alternative. The Subcommittee's support will be crucial to ensure the success of this effort going forward.

### Arecibo Observatory

Another important priority for Puerto Rico within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction is the Arecibo Observatory, which is supported by the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS) and Geosciences (GPS) Directorates. Funding for the observatory is also supplemented by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Near-Earth Object Observations (NEOO) Program.

To maintain the Arecibo Observatory's operations and crucial scientific mission, I urge the Subcommittee to provide robust funding for these programs and to include language requiring sustained federal support for the facility.

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Programs

I want to urge the Subcommittee to provide robust funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) programs. Particularly important for Puerto Rico are the

Coral Reef Conservation Program; the Integrated Ocean Observing System—which supports the Caribbean Regional Association for Coastal Ocean Observing; the National Sea Grant College Program; the National Estuarine Research Reserve System—which supports the Jobos Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve on the southern coast of the Island; and the Coastal Zone Management Grants.

I also request robust funding for NOAA's Tsunami Warning Program and its National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program, which provides funding to the Puerto Rico Seismic Network to improve community preparedness and education of tsunami threats across the Island.

*Puerto Rico's Future Political Status*

Lastly, I would like to thank Chairman Serrano for his longstanding leadership and support for equality for Puerto Rico. I also appreciate the Subcommittee's inclusion of report language in FY 2020 that instructed DOJ to provide guidance on the materials for the congressionally-sponsored plebiscite to resolve the Island's political status.

I would further appreciate the Subcommittee continuing to work with the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Department as a whole if necessary, regarding the guidance. It may also be appropriate for the Subcommittee to reiterate its instructions and views regarding DOJ's role.

As Puerto Rico continues its quest for statehood, I respectfully request that the Subcommittee do everything in its power to ensure that Puerto Rico is treated in an equal matter in all respects.

The 3.2. million Americans residing on the Island deserve no less.

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