

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 11, 2026

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Acting Comptroller General Williams Brown:

Puerto Rico is experiencing drinking water supply shortages and service interruptions affecting households and economic activity. Failing pipelines and infrastructure regularly leak about half of the territory's treated water. In mid-July, the Puerto Rico government announced rationing to preserve water supplies. The archipelago is facing drought and high temperatures from the current El Niño weather pattern. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) drought monitor, the current drought will extend through the fall, and NOAA anticipates that the Caribbean region will continue to experience drought and dry periods from stronger El Niño weather and increasing temperatures in the future.

Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA) is the public entity responsible for providing water and wastewater for the majority of the territory. It manages eight dams, 112 filter plants and intakes for drinking water supply, 50 wastewater plants, 3,800 tanks and other facilities, and 21,000 miles of pipelines. It serves almost 3.2 million people. It is overseen by the Puerto Rico Department of Health and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which administers the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act.

Puerto Rico has been repairing damaged water facilities since 2017, when Hurricane Maria damaged many water treatment buildings, tanks, pipelines, and equipment. Federal agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the EPA, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Department of Agriculture (USDA) have provided almost \$9 billion to pay for much of the PRASA infrastructure repair. Additional hurricanes in 2022 and 2023, and earthquakes in 2020, further damaged facilities and contributed to delaying repairs.

In 2025, PRASA completed a strategic plan for repairing and replacing deteriorating and failing infrastructure for fiscal years 2026-2029. It also completed a Capital Investment Plan and established a new rate structure. Together, these plans identify what the territory and water utility need to do to rebuild from disasters and prepare for future challenges such as drought and flooding. However, these projects are long-term capital projects and do not help to resolve the immediate water crisis facing Puerto Rico.

GAO recently reported on the recovery of Puerto Rico's electric grid, finding that progress in spending federal recovery funds is slow.¹ We request that GAO conduct work to respond to the following questions about Puerto Rico's water systems.

First, we request a briefing that covers the following questions at a minimum:

- (1) What are the causes of Puerto Rico's drinking water shortages and rationing? What is known about the reasons that the distribution system is in an advanced state of disrepair despite federal funding and PRASA's creditworthiness? What is the relative contribution of drought?
- (2) What are federal agencies doing to help address Puerto Rico's drinking water supply shortage, in the short-term and long-term? What have federal agencies done to help address drinking water supply shortages in other parts of the U.S. in the short-term and long-term?

We are also requesting a more in-depth examination of the following questions:

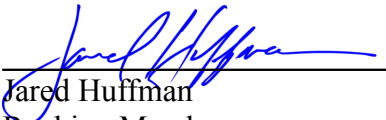
- (1) What challenges, including infrastructure, operational, and management decisions within PRASA, are contributing to Puerto Rico's water service interruptions?
- (2) What is the condition and resilience of Puerto Rico's potable water infrastructure, including its reservoirs, treatment facilities, pumping stations, transmission systems, and distribution networks?
- (3) What are the principal issues affecting the reliability and performance of Puerto Rico's wastewater system, including its sanitary sewer lines, pumping stations, treatment facilities, and discharge systems?
- (4) What financial assistance have FEMA, HUD, EPA, and USDA provided to support Puerto Rico's water system recovery since 2017, and how has this contributed to building infrastructure that is resilient to hurricanes, drought, and other natural hazards?
- (5) What is the status of federally funded water infrastructure projects, including:
 - a. Total federal funding obligated, disbursed, and expended;
 - b. The number and value of completed, ongoing, and planned projects;
 - c. Project implementation schedules and anticipated completion dates; and
 - d. The extent to which funded projects are expected to reduce water losses or improve reliability of potable water system reliability and resilience?

¹GAO, *Puerto Rico Grid Recovery: Limited Progress Toward Stability and Opportunities Exist to Improve Federal Assistance* (GAO-26-107772).

- (6) To what extent have federal and commonwealth agencies coordinated and what factors have hindered progress in recovery, modernization, and resilience of Puerto Rico's water system?
- (7) What are legislative, regulatory, administrative, or operational recommendations that could improve project delivery, accountability, and long-term water system reliability in Puerto Rico?

We look forward to your help in putting the people of Puerto Rico on a path to water security.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural
Resources



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Energy and Natural
Resources



Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland
Security