

# THE INSULAR AREA CLIMATE CHANGE ACT

April 2021

The “U.S.-affiliated insular areas” —which include the U.S. Territories and Freely Associated States—stand on the front lines of the climate crisis. More than 3.5 million U.S. citizens and U.S. nationals reside in the insular areas.

The already serious impacts of climate change for those living in the insular areas are made worse by unequal access to federal programs that build climate resiliency, an over-reliance on petroleum, and existing infrastructure that fails to meet new hazard mitigation codes.

In 2017 Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were hit hard by Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. These disasters caused thousands of deaths and significant damage to local infrastructure, including Puerto Rico’s fragile power grid. In 2018, Typhoon Yutu struck the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, causing multiple deaths and destroying thousands of homes in the two territories.

Based in part on these experiences, local governments, climate change experts, organizations, and communities contributed to the development of the Insular Area Climate Change Act. The Natural Resources Committee held a legislative hearing in March 2021 on a Discussion Draft of the bill, which included a panel of local political leaders and climate experts to speak on the unique climate-related conditions and threats facing the insular areas. The *Insular Area Climate Change Act* provides for climate change planning, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in U.S. Territories and Freely Associated States.

## KEY INSULAR CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS:

- The creation of a federal interagency task force to provide U.S. territories greater access to climate change-related federal programs.
- The establishment of an Office of Insular Area Energy Policy and Programs within the Department of Energy to better direct energy management, planning, delivery, and conservation programs in the insular areas.
- The establishment of an Insular Area National Program Office within the Environmental Protection Agency focused on strengthening infrastructure to withstand natural disasters, expanding renewable energy and energy efficiency, providing technical assistance, and centralizing EPA efforts in the insular areas.
- Multiple grants to study and develop technologies to reduce climate crisis impacts in the insular areas.
- Additional grant programs to expand renewable energy and energy efficiency and develop sustainable infrastructure to withstand natural disasters in the insular areas.
- The cancellation of federal loan repayments and the waiving of matching fund requirements for insular areas, which for decades have struggled with limited financial resources.
- The creation of a report by the Secretary of the Interior and other experts that includes an analysis of nuclear waste and other toxins within the Enewetak Atoll, including in the “Runit Dome” nuclear waste disposal site and the dumping areas in Enewetak’s lagoon, and plans to relocate this waste to a secure facility.