



LEAGUE *of* UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS

Testimony for Rev. Carmen G. Cabrera
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Puerto Rico Chapter
Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Natural Resources
“Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2070 & H.R. 1522”
June 16, 2021

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Good afternoon distinguished members of the Committee on Natural Resources. I am honored to join you in this hearing on H.R. 2070 and H.R. 1522.

I appear before you today in representation of the Puerto Rico Chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens also known as LULAC, the oldest and most widely respected Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States of America. I also appear before you in representation of the majority of voters in Puerto Rico, which last November chose statehood as the permanent political status for the Island.

I was born, raised and have lived in Puerto Rico all of my life. I know first-hand the geography, culture, arts, politics, and the faith in God of the Puerto Rican people. I also know first-hand that the People of Puerto Rico's hope is to soon wake up in a place where Justice and Equality shine upon all more than the sun at noon. In a place where the limbo of territorial second-class citizenship has been abolished, and where full democracy and voting rights at the federal level prove our equality as American Citizens.

Puerto Ricans have incredible talents, skills and make countless contributions to America in fields like music, art, sports, and science. We even have a proud Puerto Rican Astronaut in NASA, Joseph Acabá, a true patriot hero. Yet, these contributions pale in comparison to the sacrifice and bloodshed by our Puerto Rican soldiers who have fought and died defending America's liberty and democracy. The value of their lives, and the sacrifices of the families who have seen their loved ones come back in flag draped coffins, can never be fully repaid by America. Yet the least that Congress can do is to respect the will of the majority of voters in

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Puerto Rico that have demanded equality and extend a formal offer of statehood so that island residents can make a final choice.

We are in a moment of reckoning in Puerto Rico. For the first time in my life, people are not afraid to be honest and call Puerto Rico's relationship with the U.S. what it is. Puerto Rico is a colony. A possession. We are done with the "Commonwealth" label. It is time to fix it. The Constitution is clear: Congress makes the final decision on how to resolve the current undemocratic arrangement. Both proposals pending before Congress involve a vote by the people of Puerto Rico. However, HR 2070 imposes on the people of Puerto Rico a Constitutional convention before we hold a referendum vote. The people of Puerto Rico have not asked for this Constitutional convention. The convention would be imposed on us. This is not democracy. As a Puerto Rican voter, I urge Congress to be direct. If Congress cannot guarantee my continued U.S. citizenship, I need to know that now. The answer is available now. We don't need a convention to find out. Congress and the White House have considered this issue for decades. As voters, Puerto Ricans have made their choice. We want statehood now.

As a leading national civil rights organization, LULAC advocates for all American citizens, including those in Puerto Rico to have equal rights and equal opportunities, but the simple truth is that as long as the island remains a territory Congress will continue to treat Puerto Ricans unequally and deny them full rights and representation at the federal level.

For these reasons we endorse H.R. 1522 by Rep. Darren Soto and Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Cólon, which respects the will of the majority of voters in Puerto Rico, and oppose H.R. 2070. H.R. 1522 would put an end to citizen disenfranchisement

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and the racialized oppression of unincorporated territory status. The solution for this citizen inequality is for Puerto Rico to finally become a state of the Union.

If Puerto Rico had already been a state, and not just a territory, when the island was ravished by Hurricane Maria, shaken by earthquakes and enveloped by the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government's response would have been very different when dealing with these life and death events that have greatly affected our island and its people. If we had already been a state, and not just a territory, the disaster relief would have come more quickly, saved more lives, and the ongoing post disaster reconstruction would have made much more progress than it has in the last four years.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking here today. I truly believe that God has placed in your hands the opportunity to do justice by the People of Puerto Rico, and I humbly ask that in considering this issue you not only use your minds, and your reason, but that you look into your hearts for the right thing to do. May God bless you all, and enlighten you to understand and pass H.R. 1522.