

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 11, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Chair DeLauro:

We write you to ask that Congress provide the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) \$5 billion for rooftop solar and storage solutions for low-income households and households with people with disabilities in Puerto Rico in an emergency supplemental appropriations bill. Puerto Rico's electrical infrastructure continues to yield island-wide blackouts and frequent long-term outages, despite skyrocketing energy prices on the island, including seven price increases in recent months. Those most impacted by natural disasters must be first in line for relief.

For too long, the people of Puerto Rico have been deprived of a reliable, resilient, and sustainable energy utility. The urgent need for this resource has been made exceptionally clear after multiple natural disasters that have recently impacted Puerto Rico, including Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, several earthquakes in 2020, and now Hurricane Fiona. Each of these disasters caused a devastating loss of life, extensive structural damage, and the total failure of the territory's centralized power grid. Each time there is such a mass grid collapse, Puerto Rico's more than three million residents are left wondering how long it will last, and communities in the past have remained in the dark for several weeks or, in some cases after Hurricane Maria, months. Without power, businesses cannot operate, hospitals lack the resources to treat patients, schools must shut down, and residents are unable to carry out basic tasks for survival, such as keeping food and medication cool, powering essential medical equipment, or boiling water to remove contaminants when access to safe drinking water is scarce. Dependable energy undergirds a functioning economy. Low-income households and those with disabilities feel the impacts first and worst.

Efforts to modernize the power grid have seen limited success, impeded for years by recurring delays in project submissions and approvals, technological failures, the persistence of the electric generation authority's multi-billion-dollar debt, and a general lack of coordination between the entities responsible for developing Puerto Rico's electrical system and disaster resiliency. These obstacles prolong Puerto Rico's dependency on an outdated and fossil fuel-reliant grid, further deterring progress toward the territory's renewable energy goals: 40% electricity generation from

renewables by 2025 and 100% by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Currently, only 3% of Puerto Rico’s energy is supplied from renewable sources.<sup>2</sup> Further, although billions of dollars have been allocated towards aiding Puerto Rico in its recovery and resiliency-building, including \$28 billion in Public Assistance funds from FEMA over the past five years and more than \$20 billion provided by Congress to invest Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) in local communities, only a handful of permanent work projects have been completed and only a fraction of these funds have been expended by the government of Puerto Rico.<sup>3</sup>

In hopes that a private company would address historically abysmal service and high electricity bills, Puerto Rico privatized management of the grid to LUMA Energy, LLC (LUMA). Since they took over in 2021, they have failed to meet their own performance benchmarks and have overseen an increase in the duration of power outages.

For these reasons and more, the market for rooftop solar and batteries is among the most active in the country. But a new residential solar panel and battery system costs about \$25,000, while the median household income Puerto Rico is just over \$21,000.<sup>4</sup> Those without the means to buy or finance them are getting left behind. For many people in Puerto Rico, energy independence is a survival strategy, and it’s out of reach for those that need it most.

A preliminary study from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory’s (NREL) PR100 program suggests that Puerto Rico’s high exposure to sunlight could potentially provide energy well in excess of current needs from rooftop solar power.<sup>5</sup> The record of reliability of solar power in Puerto Rico, especially during a crisis is excellent and growing. Amidst the island-wide blackout caused by Hurricane Fiona, households and businesses equipped for solar-powered generation and storage fared much better than those who were reliant on the centralized grid. For example, Sunnova Energy, a residential solar installation company, reported that 97% of its customers had access to electricity after the storm.<sup>6</sup> Nonprofit organizations, which have largely led and subsidized projects to install rooftop solar and battery storage systems in Puerto Rico, continue to share that their efforts have allowed critical services like hospitals and fire stations to continue

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<sup>1</sup> SB 1121 Puerto Rico Energy Public Policy Act, p. 23. The law also requires the closing of all coal-fired electrical generation by 2028.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Puerto Rico – Territory Profile and Energy Estimates*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=RQ>.

<sup>3</sup> Government Accountability Office, Chris Currie, Director, Homeland Security and Justice, “Update on FEMA’s Disaster Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands,” September 15, 2022. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-106211.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Espada, Mariah. *Solar Power is Helping Some Puerto Rico Homes Avoid Hurricane Fiona Blackouts*. September 20, 2022. Time. <https://time.com/6215138/solar-power-puerto-rico-hurricane-fiona/>.

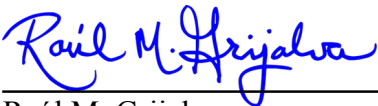
<sup>5</sup> The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), *Puerto Rico Low-to-Moderate Income Rooftop PV and Solar Savings Potential*, December 17, 2020. <https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy21osti/78756.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Maria Gallucci, Canary Media, “Puerto Rico’s Solar Users Are Still Among ‘Fortunate Few’ With Power,” September 23, 2022. <https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/solar/most-puerto-ricans-still-in-the-dark-after-hurricane-fiona>

operating and have provided residents with access to power while the island's grid continues to be repaired.<sup>7</sup>

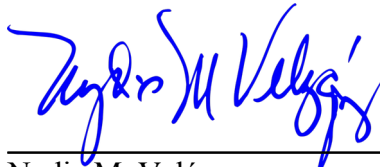
Nonprofits cannot bear the responsibility of developing Puerto Rico's solar energy generation capacity alone. We respectfully request your support in asking that Congress provide \$5 billion to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) through emergency supplemental appropriations to provide rooftop solar and battery systems for low-income households and households with individuals with disabilities throughout Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,



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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress  
Chair, Committee on Natural  
Resources



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Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



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Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



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Jennifer González-Colón  
Member of Congress



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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress



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Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress



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Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

*Kathy Castor*

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Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

*André carson*

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André Carson  
Member of Congress

*Lloyd Doggett*

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Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress

*Lisa Blunt Rochester*

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*Eric Swalwell*

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Eric Swalwell  
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*Doris Matsui*

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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress

*Jake Auchincloss*

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*Nanette Diaz Barragán*

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*Suzanne Bonamici*

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Suzanne Bonamici  
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*Sean Casten*

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*Mark DeSaulnier*

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*Ted W. Lieu*

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*Grace F. Napolitano*

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*Grace Meng*

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*Troy Carter*

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Troy Carter  
Member of Congress



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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



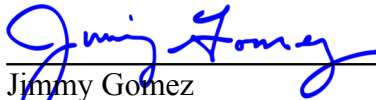
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Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Tony Cárdenas  
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Carolyn B. Maloney  
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Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



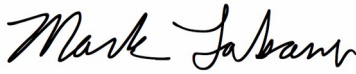
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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



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Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress



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MARK TAKANO  
Member of Congress



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Karen Bass  
Member of Congress