

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 3, 2024

The Honorable Adrienne Todman
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Acting Secretary Todman:

Thank you for your efforts in supporting Puerto Rico's reconstruction and recovery. We are pleased to acknowledge that the \$20.4 billion in federal funding allocated through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have been fully obligated.¹ As a result, key programs like the Home Repair, Reconstruction or Relocation Program (R3), which is creating safer homes for vulnerable residents, are progressing.² Additionally, the Puerto Rican Government launched the Energy Grid Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Cost Share Program (ER1) and the Electrical Power Reliability and Resilience Program (ER2) using CDBG-DR funds to improve the island's fragile energy system.³

Such investments are part of the comprehensive approach your department, along with FEMA and others, have taken to address Puerto Rico's long and difficult recovery.⁴ We urge you to keep prioritizing actions that strengthen interagency coordination. Specifically, we ask that HUD reestablish its San Juan Field Office under Region II jurisdiction, aligning it with other offices involved in Puerto Rico's recovery. Although all HUD's funds have been obligated, only 16 percent have been disbursed.⁵ And to accelerate recovery and maximize these investments, effective communication and coordination between agencies and departments are needed.

Until October 1989, HUD's San Juan Field Office was part of Region II. This changed after former HUD Secretary Jack Kemp reassigned the office's oversight to Region IV in Atlanta, GA, following a scandal involving U.S. Senator Alfonse D' Amato (R-NY) and former Regional Administrator Joseph Monticciolo. However, the issues that led to the reassignment have long been addressed.

Relocating the San Juan Field Office back to Region II offers several benefits to both HUD and the Puerto Rican people. For instance, many of HUD's federal partners—including FEMA, the

¹ Off. Portal of the Gov't of Puerto Rico, *Transparency Portal*, CENT. OFF. FOR RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION AND RESILIENCY COR3, <https://recovery.pr.gov/en>

² CDBG-DR Funds, CDBG-MIT Funds, *R3 Home Repair, Reconstruction or Relocation Program*, CENT. OFF. FOR RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION AND RESILIENCY COR3, <https://recuperacion.pr.gov/en/r3/>

³ CDBG-DR Funds, *Electrical System Enhancements*, CENT. OFF. FOR RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION AND RESILIENCY COR3, <https://recuperacion.pr.gov/en/electrical-system-enhancements/>

⁴ Press Release, The White House, Readout of the First Meeting of the White House Working Group on Puerto Rico (July 20, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/07/20/readout-of-the-first-meeting-of-the-white-house-working-group-on-puerto-rico/>

utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news

⁵ *Ibid.*

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Departments of Commerce (DOC) and Health and Human Services (HHS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Small Business Administration (SBA)—serve Puerto Rico through their offices in New York. Yet, these agencies must contact HUD’s Atlanta office for Puerto Rico-related matters, creating confusion and inefficiency. Even HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) serves Puerto Rico from New York. Reassigning the San Juan office to Region II would streamline operations and improve interagency collaboration.

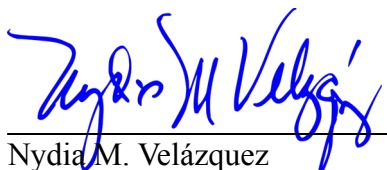
External stakeholders in Puerto Rico also face challenges when working with HUD, as they frequently need to coordinate with Region IV in Atlanta while working with other agencies in New York. Moving the San Juan office to Region II’s jurisdiction would help resolve these issues, enhance emergency management, and improve operational efficiency. It would also take advantage of the more frequent direct flights between New York City and San Juan compared to Atlanta.

Moreover, federal staff in New York have deeper ties to Puerto Rico, due to the tri-state area’s large Puerto Rican diaspora. As of 2020, nearly one million individuals of Puerto Rican origin lived in New York,⁶ and three of the four members of Congress of Puerto Rican descent represent New York. Reestablishing the San Juan Field Office as part of Region II will likely increase the number of culturally competent staff handling Puerto Rico’s recovery and affordable housing crisis.


We are confident that realigning HUD’s San Juan Field Office to Region II is a step toward ensuring that Puerto Rico receives the most efficient support from HUD.

Thank you for attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress


Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

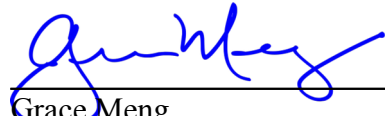

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Eight Hispanic Groups Each Had a Million or More Population in 2020*, U.S. Dep’t of Com., [https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/09/2020-census-dhc-a-hispanic-population.html#:~:text=Florida%20was%20home%20to%20the,largest%20Honduran%20population%20\(168%2C578\).](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/09/2020-census-dhc-a-hispanic-population.html#:~:text=Florida%20was%20home%20to%20the,largest%20Honduran%20population%20(168%2C578).)

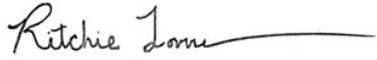
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Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



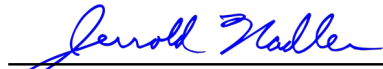
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress