

NHLA's Priorities for Puerto Rico are included within each section of the 2020–2024 Public Policy Agenda

PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico is home to over 3 million people who are denied some of the basic rights and federal benefits of citizens living on the U.S. mainland, despite paying billions of dollars in federal taxes each year. As U.S. citizens and taxpayers, people in Puerto Rico deserve the same treatment as those living on the U.S. mainland. Puerto Rico has been plagued in recent years by natural disasters that have resulted in widespread death and devastation to outdated infrastructure. The island's recovery has been slowed by ineffective federal response and assistance and an overreliance on public debt by the local government. Our federal government has a moral and legal responsibility to help Puerto Rico recover. Congress and the federal government must enact a "Marshall Plan" to systematically invest the resources necessary to rebuild, revitalize, and revive Puerto Rico.

Today, Puerto Rico is hit by extreme austerity due to the PROMESA federal law, which resulted in the closure of hundreds of schools and proposals to take money from the university system, cut pensions, and undermine worker protections by allowing workers to be paid less than the federal minimum wage. It is time for Congress to repeal PROMESA.

PRINCIPAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ECONOMIC SECURITY AND EMPOWERMENT

- Ensure adequate disaster relief and other federal funds are appropriated and released in a timely and legal manner, without additional restrictions and barriers to access that are not required of other post-disaster entities.
- Repeal the PROMESA legislation, and reverse draconian austerity measures imposed by the federal budgetary oversight board that allows workers to be paid less than the minimum wage in Puerto Rico.
- Enact a Marshall Plan to hasten Puerto Rico's recovery from its natural disasters.
- Ensure people in Puerto Rico have equitable access to federal programs including the federal Child Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid.
- Repeal the Jones Act, which requires shipments to Puerto Rico to cost more than those to the mainland United States.



EDUCATION

- Halt austerity measures imposed on Puerto Rico by the federal budgetary oversight board in the PROMESA legislation, which have resulted in school closures and decreased funding for the island's public university system.
- Allocate and distribute funds appropriated by Congress to Puerto Rico for rebuilding and restarting the island's education system without imposing additional controls that are not required of other local governments.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

- Require the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and other federal agencies to release all disaster relief funds that are appropriated by Congress.
- Establish a moratorium on negotiations or repayment of existing debt until the federal government has ensured an independent audit is performed and certified by non-governmental experts, and discharge of any illegal or unconstitutional debt is allowed.
- Establish a process that ensures transparency in decisions, allocations, and contracts by all government agencies at every level to avoid corruption and favoritism.
- Ensure meaningful community participation and appropriate allocation of resources.
- Create systems that ensure public participation and radical transparency during all phases of decision-making processes, such as robust stakeholder analysis, and collaborative and mandatory public participation mechanisms.

CIVIL RIGHTS

- Prioritize collection of damage awards against the local government for civil rights and constitutional violations in the debt-restructuring proceedings in federal court.
- Ensure rebuilding and recovery in Puerto Rico are not an excuse for exploitation or displacement or for waiving any civil, human, or environmental rights in the name of speed or greed.
- Prioritize mitigation before displacement in the recovery and rebuilding process. People should be allowed to elect to stay, choose where to relocate, and have a say in decisions that impact their communities.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- Bolster Puerto Rico's agriculture sector and promote resilient and sustainable local food production, and access to safe, potable water, which is essential for communities on the island to recover and thrive.
- Support investments into renewable and sustainable energy sources.

HEALTH

- Eliminate federal funding healthcare disparities and make large-scale investments to revitalize the infrastructure and operations in hospitals and community health centers, and retain medical professionals on the island.
- Require Medicare programs in Puerto Rico to be reimbursed at the same rate as programs in the mainland United States.