



April 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We, the undersigned organizations, a group of nonprofit, community-based and philanthropic entities in Puerto Rico and the continental United States, are writing to urgently request that the next COVID-19 legislative relief include language granting Puerto Rico access to the resources for a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) option.

The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020* (Families First) increased flexibility and allowed for a P-EBT option if a school is closed for at least 5 consecutive days during a public health emergency if the school would otherwise be in session. P-EBT is available to both SNAP and non-SNAP households with children who qualify for free or reduced price meals under Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and have temporarily lost access to school meals due to pandemic-related school closures. The benefit is equivalent to the cost of free breakfast and lunch in the jurisdiction multiplied by the average number of days the school was closed. Benefits are calculated monthly for each eligible child in the household. The average benefit could range between \$114-\$133.20 per child each month.

*Families First* did not provide Puerto Rico access to the resources provided to States and other territories to implement the P-EBT option. Puerto Rico operates a slightly different system (NAP) and therefore is not eligible for this funding. However, as this funding is available for non-SNAP households, Puerto Rico families should also qualify. Without access to the *Families First* appropriation for P-EBT, Puerto Rico would need to use its NAP funding to provide P-EBT support. This would reduce the availability of existing NAP resources available to cover additional COVID-19 related needs, such as increased eligibility, evidenced by the 71,000 new applications received in the past months, and increased food insecurity. Under P-EBT, these students would receive direct assistance from the U.S. Treasury equivalent to the dollar amount for the cost of their school-administered meals. This would have a direct impact on children and their households by increasing the number of alternatives available to them to obtain adequate food during these difficult times. In order for Puerto Rico to implement P-EBT, Congress must include specific provisions to address Puerto Rico's unique situation in the next Covid-19 relief legislation.

Puerto Rico's children have lived through a particularly difficult three years that have included long periods of school closures, Hurricane Maria, recent earthquakes, and now the COVID-19 pandemic. Most have experienced this upheaval in poverty. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of Puerto Rico's children live in poverty, and in the majority of cases that poverty is extreme (39%). The proportion of children from working class families who will also now become poor as a result of their parent's sudden loss of employment or income is a grave concern.

Given these high levels of economic precarity among children, the School Lunch and School Breakfast programs are essential components of their basic diet and safety net. School closures, along with the subsequent interruption of the school meal program, have placed an additional burden on families with children, as they have to now stretch their scarce dollars further. As was the case after Hurricane Maria, this has meant that many children are missing meals and going hungry. A study by the Youth Development Institute revealed that after Hurricane Maria around 25% of the poorest families were not able to provide three daily meals for their children.

The Puerto Rico Department of Education, which operates as a unitary system and serves as the State Education Agency (SEA) and also as the only Local Education Agency (LEA), asked for a waiver to allow non-congregate meals and distributed food from the School Lunch program to some nonprofits in the island, but given the great number of children in need in the island, and the complexity of the logistics in the midst of the pandemic, this effort is not nearly enough. We believe that access to P-EBT would be the most effective way to ensure an adequate, immediate response to the nutrition emergency Puerto Ricans are experiencing, with the resources going directly to families with children in need.

The Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico, the entity leading the coordination of these Congressional advocacy efforts, is available to provide Congress with information needed to support this urgent request, including relevant data, and testimonies from family members or signatories to this letter.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Rivera  
Executive Director  
*Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico*

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)	First Focus Campaign for Children	Feeding America
Cruz Roja Americana PR	NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice	Child Welfare League of America
American Heart Association	National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd	University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras
American Federation of Teachers	University of Puerto Rico, Medical Science Campus	Sierra Club
National Child Care Association	DePaul University	American Academy of Pediatrics- Puerto Rico
Hispanic Federation	Coalition on Human Needs	RESULTS DC
UnidosUS	National Association of Social Workers	March of Dimes
		Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico- AFT

Puerto Rico Pediatric Society	Center for Community Outreach for Health Across the Lifespan	National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Chicago Chapter
National Puerto Rican Agenda	Children's Advocacy Institute	Puerto Rican Cultural Center
Oxfam America	ASI Alimentación Segura Infantil	Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc.
Flamboyán Foundation	Grupo Intensivo Pediátrico de San Juan	COSIANI
Fundación Colibrí Puerto Rico	Red por los Derechos de la Niñez y Juventud de Puerto Rico	Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Food Bank For NYC	Muslim Caucus of America	Organización Solidaridad Humanitaria
Family Equality Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)	Fundación Hogar Niñito Jesús, Inc.	Center for Science in the Public Interest
Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico	Muévete PR	Nuestra Escuela
Coalition for Food Security PR	Puerto Ricans in Minnesota	Puerto Rican Cultural Center
College & Community Fellowship	Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico	Organización Solidaridad Humanitaria
Asociación Puertorriqueña de Centros de Cuidado y Desarrollo del Niño, Inc.	National Health Law Program	Power 4 Puerto Rico
Learning Communities	Clínica Dr. Diego Bravo	Asociación Puertorriqueños En Marcha, Inc.
Puerto Rico Children and Youth Task Force	University of Utah	P.E.C.E.S., Inc.
Proyecto Nacer, Inc.	Vive En Forma	City Harvest
One Stop Career Center of PR Inc	The Puerto Rican Agenda of Chicago	Organización Solidaridad humanitaria
Moms Rising	Puerto Rican Agenda	PFLAG National
Mujeres de Islas	LAM Architect	Family Focused Treatment Association
Instituto Tercera Misión	Grupo Pediátrico de Caguas	Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
FURIA, Inc	Comunidad La Hormiga, Inc.	Friends of Puerto Rico
ACCESS	Miranda Foundation	Org. Pro Ambiente Sustentable OPAS
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger	Rush Hospital	Karma honey project
Black Women's Blueprint	Puerto Rico Statehood Council	Integro Foundation
Women of Color Network, Inc.	Sabana Grande Community and Development Corp	
	SACED	

Cc:

The Honorable Robert C. Scott

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