HNBA
HISPANIC NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE ISLAND OF PUERTO RICO

WHEREAS, the Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) represents the interests of over 78,000 Hispanic legal professionals, which includes attorneys, judges, law professors, legal assistants, law students in the United States and its territories;[i]

WHEREAS, Puerto Rico has its own vibrant culture, history, music and gastronomy that has positively influenced the continental United States for over a century;

WHEREAS, recently Puerto Rico has had significant economic and social hardships as a result of several disasters (Hurricane Maria in 2017, earthquakes in 2019 and a pandemic in 2020);

WHEREAS, Puerto Rico faces significant economic challenges, including in 2015, Puerto Rico's government debt was more than $70 billion (with pension obligations of an additional $49 billion);[ii]

WHEREAS, in 2016, the US Congress enacted a federal board to oversee the island's finances, which has resulted in onerous structural reforms for the people of Puerto Rico;[iii]

WHEREAS, economic growth in Puerto Rico has fallen by approximately 12.5 percent between 2004 and 2020;[iv]

WHEREAS, Puerto Rico's unemployment has been as high as 16% in 2010 and hovers around 6% now;[v]

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the HNBA urges the 118th Congress to:

- Authorize a permanent waiver or exemption of the Jones Act for Puerto Rico;[vi]
- Pass legislation that dissolves the Oversight Board at the soonest possible time to return local control of its finances to Puerto Rico's government;
- Re-authorize the additional spending allowed by the Affordable Care Act for Puerto Rico, which expired in 2019;
- Study and make a determination on where there are gaps in Puerto Rico's safety net, which is tied to its status as a territory (e.g., Medicaid in Puerto Rico, like other territories, is capped and receives block grants at the beginning of the year which are far below what it should receive if it were a state); and
- Pass legislation that would focus on stimulating the local economy.

Citations and Comments

[i] No Author. HNBA, *About Us*. https://hnba.com/aboutus/#:~:text=The%20Hispanic%20National%20Bar%20Association,United%20States%20and%20its%20territories.
[ii] No Author. Britannica, *Puerto Rico*. https://www.britannica.com/place/Puerto-Rico/The-economy.
[iii] Id.
[iv] No Author - Backgrounder. Council on Foreign Relations. *Puerto Rico: A U.S. Territory in Crisis*. https://www.cfr.org/ backgrounder/puerto-rico-us-territory-crisis. No Author. US Federal Reserve – St. Louis. *Unemployment Rate in Puerto Rico*. https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PRURN.
[v] No Author. Macrotrends. *Puerto Rico Unemployment Rate 1991-2023*. https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/PRI/puerto-rico/unemployment-rate.
[vi] The Jones Act requires any cargo shipped between U.S. ports to be carried by U.S. ships, with American crews.