



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 1601

Resolution calling on the Federal Emergency Management Agency to use its planned \$9.6 billion investment to green and harden Puerto Rico's power grid by helping to transition the island to renewable energy.

By Council Members D. Diaz, Chin, Rosenthal, Gibson, Koslowitz, Rivera and Louis

Whereas, On February 25, 2021, Puerto Rico and New York City have a strong connection, with New York City historically having one of the largest population of people of Puerto Rican origin within the United States (U.S.) outside Puerto Rico; and

Whereas, The U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate shows 669,605 people of Puerto Rican origin living in the five boroughs, which is more than any other city in the U.S. mainland; and

Whereas, In September 2017, Hurricanes Irma and Maria swept through Puerto Rico two weeks apart, causing billions of dollars in damage, taking thousands of lives, and leaving millions of Puerto Ricans without power and clean water; and

Whereas, On January 7, 2020, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck the island, leading to several aftershocks that significantly damaged the nation's two largest power plants and left two-thirds of its residents without power, with U.S. Geological Survey experts estimating that aftershocks from this earthquake will persist for years to decades, albeit with decreasing frequency; and

Whereas, On January 14, 2020, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio responded to the earthquakes' impact, calling Puerto Rico "our sixth borough," highlighting the strong connection between New York City and Puerto Rico; and

Whereas, In September 2020, Puerto Rico was promised nearly \$13 billion in federal disaster funding,

of which \$9.6 billion was meant to help the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) repair and replace transmission and distribution lines, power generation systems, and make other improvements to its power grid; and

Whereas, According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration's (EIA) profile of Puerto Rico, approximately 75% of the energy generated in Puerto Rico has come from imported petroleum products, with roughly 50% of its electricity from petroleum-fired power plants, 29% from imported natural gas, 19% from coal and only 2.5% from renewable energy sources, according to fiscal year 2020 sources; and

Whereas, The EIA profile also noted that most of Puerto Rico's population is concentrated in the north of the island, while its highly centralized power grid and largest generating plants are in the south, making Puerto Rico's power system highly reliant on 2,400 miles of transmission and 30,000 miles of distribution lines; and

Whereas, The Hurricanes Irma and Maria destroyed most of that transmission and distribution infrastructure in 2017, while the January 2020 earthquake significantly damaged Puerto Rico's two largest power plants, both of which are natural gas power plants, leading to an increased dependence on petroleum for power and demonstrating a need for renewable energy sources and a more resilient energy infrastructure and power grid system; and

Whereas, The Puerto Rico Energy Public Policy Act was signed into law by the Governor of Puerto Rico in April 2019, after passage of the legislation by both houses of the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico, and mandates that PREPA has to obtain 40% of its electricity from renewable resources by 2025, 60% by 2040, and 100% by 2050, while also phasing out coal-fired generation by 2028; and

Whereas, In December of 2020, PREPA submitted their ten-year Infrastructure Modernization Plan to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to detail how it plans to use its \$9.6 billion allocation and included within that plan \$853 million for the construction of new natural gas generation infrastructure, undermining its own renewable energy and grid resiliency goals; and

Whereas, According to a February 2021 report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, an Ohio-based clean energy think tank, and CAMBIO, a Puerto Rican nonprofit, under their advanced energy model, Puerto Rico could achieve 75% renewable energy in 15 years and 100% household resiliency, where households would have access to electricity thanks to on-site power generation in the event of a large power grid failure, by 2035 with no need for investment in new fossil fuel-based power plants and utilize the \$9.6 billion in federal funding to cost-effectively start implementing the plan, reducing electric systems costs to less than 15 cents per kilowatt-hour by 2035 compared to 21 cents per kilowatt-hour in 2019; and

Whereas, Puerto Rico's utilization of this \$9.6 billion in relief funding for transitioning its power grid to increase resiliency and renewable energy production would not only reduce its dependence on expensive imported petroleum goods, but also provide a model for U.S. states and territories as they look to transition their electrical grids; and

Whereas, Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer and Congressional Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nydia M. Velázquez, along with 14 other federal House and Senate members sent a letter to FEMA imploring the agency to ensure that the funding is used solely for expanding Puerto Rico's renewable energy generation and improving power grid resiliency; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the Federal Emergency Management Agency to use its planned \$9.6 billion investment to green and harden Puerto Rico's power grid by helping to transition the island to renewable energy.

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