



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

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United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman:

The people of Puerto Rico are suffering from painful poverty and hunger, persistent joblessness, and other social problems, as a result of the financial crisis gripping the Commonwealth's economy. They bear little responsibility for the situation yet suffer most of the consequences. Congress can and should remedy this situation by advancing the Puerto Rico Chapter 9 Uniformity Act.

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* teaches:

The right to development must be taken into account when considering questions related to the debt crisis of many poor countries. . . . Complex causes of various types lie at the origin of the debt crisis, [but] . . . [t]he greatest sufferings, which can be traced back both to structural questions as well as personal behaviour, strike the people of poor and indebted countries who are not responsible for this situation. The international community cannot ignore this fact. . . (No. 450)

Earlier this year, Pope Francis affirmed this to the General Assembly of the United Nations, decrying lending systems that "subject people to mechanisms which generate greater poverty, exclusion and dependence." Financial instruments should encourage development, not deprivation. We all have a shared responsibility to protect our poor and vulnerable brothers and sisters around the world.

The government of Puerto Rico's political status has made it difficult to fulfill adequately its obligation to ensure human needs are met and advance the common good. Because it is not a sovereign nation, it cannot access financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund; because it is not a state, federal law exempts it from crucial protections in the bankruptcy code. With virtually no other option at its disposal currently, Puerto Rico remains at the mercy of creditors with seemingly little concern for the pain and suffering caused to the people and families of Puerto Rico.

The Bankruptcy Code explicitly and inexplicably excludes Puerto Rico from the definition of 'state' for the purpose of seeking protection under Chapter 9. The Puerto Rico Chapter 9 Uniformity Act would allow the Puerto Rican people, through their government, to take greater control of their development and destiny. I encourage you to support this legislation.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development