

## **Equitable Nutrition Assistance for the Territories Act of 2020** *Sen. Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY)*

### *Background*

Puerto Rico is in especially dire need of increased food assistance funding as a result of hundreds of earthquakes, which devastated parts of the island, and the current global pandemic. The Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa also receive block grants instead of SNAP, putting pressure on their funding for nutrition assistance. Guam and the U.S.V.I. are existing participants of SNAP. We must get at the root cause of this inequity to ensure that all citizens are treated equally.

In the early 1980's, Congress removed Puerto Rico from what was then the Food Stamp Program and replaced it with a block grant, the Nutrition Assistance Program. The block grant has meant less funding and fewer benefits for Puerto Ricans. One third of adult residents in Puerto Rico experience food insecurity. People who receive assistance through the Nutrition Assistance Program receive fewer benefits than SNAP recipients do. A family of four in Puerto Rico receives a maximum benefit of \$410 per month while a family of four living in the Continental U.S. receives a maximum benefit of \$649 per month.

The federal SNAP program responds to times of need. The structure of the program allows it to meet the needs of food insecure Americans during times of high poverty, unemployment, and economic downturns. The block grant for nutrition assistance for these three territories has meant that no matter how many people are facing food insecurity, the amount of funding stays the same.

### *What does this bill do?*

The Equitable Nutrition Assistance for the Territories Act of 2020 provides Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands a transition path to SNAP.

In order to participate in SNAP, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Northern Mariana Islands would be required to submit a plan of operation and a beginning date to the USDA. A voluntary \$5 million grant program provides funding for information technology needed to implement SNAP. Under this legislation, the Family Market Program in Puerto Rico will be allowed to continue.

*For questions, please email:*

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