

Equitable Nutrition Assistance for the Territories Act of 2019

Puerto Rico is in especially dire need of increased food assistance funding as a result of the hurricanes last year, which devastated the island. Without new appropriations, Puerto Rico will run out of funding for the Nutrition Assistance Program that was approved in response to the hurricanes. An [estimated](#) 1.4 million U.S. citizens, including 300,000 children will face a large cut to their food assistance benefits, and up to 230,000 people will lose their benefits entirely.

In the early 1980's, Puerto Rico was removed from SNAP and given a block grant to administer nutrition assistance. The block grant, the Nutrition Assistance Program, has meant less funding and fewer benefits for Puerto Ricans – 85 percent of whom are food insecure. People who receive assistance through the Nutrition Assistance Program receive fewer benefits than SNAP recipients. 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 Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa also receive block grants instead of SNAP, putting pressure on their funding for nutrition assistance.

In January, the House of Representatives approved additional disaster funding for Puerto Rico, which included an additional \$600 million for Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) funding. President Trump's administration called the \$600 million needed for food assistance "excessive and unnecessary."

That is why Senators Sanders and Representative Velázquez are introducing the Equitable Nutrition Assistance for the Territories Act of 2019. The legislation introduced today is needed more than ever in the aftermath of a decades-long fiscal crisis, Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the imminent disaster funding cliff.

The Equitable Nutrition Assistance for the Territories Act of 2019 is an amendment to the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. The bill allows Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands to transition to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP offers nutrition assistance to eligible, low-income individuals and families. (Guam and the U.S.V.I. are existing participants of SNAP.)

In order to participate in SNAP, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Northern Mariana Islands are required to submit a plan of operation and a beginning date to the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is permitted to continue providing benefits in the form of cash. The Family Market Program under SNAP in Puerto Rico will also be allowed to continue. The Act authorizes the appropriation of necessary funds to the Secretary of Agriculture every fiscal year.