May 8, 2018

The Honorable Ricardo A. Rosselló Nevares
Governor of Puerto Rico
La Fortaleza
P.O. Box 9020082
San Juan, PR 00902-0082

Dear Governor Rosselló,

As Members of Congress, it is our role to ensure that all students regardless of race, ethnicity, language, country of origin, income, disability or immigration status have access to equitable educational opportunities. In that vein, we write to strongly oppose the impending closure of 280 public schools in Puerto Rico, which critically compromise access to education on the Island.

Today, Puerto Rico’s residents continue struggling to recover from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria. The closure of such a large number of schools – that served as the feeding and supply distribution centers in the immediate aftermath of the storm - will displace students and families, and further destabilize communities.

The proposal to close 280 schools this summer comes less than one year after Puerto Rico closed 167 schools. This brings the total number of schools slated for closure to 450, nearly 35 percent of the total number of public schools on the island. These closures would affect some 66,000 students and teachers; it would have a disastrous impact on children’s learning. Students will have to travel longer distances, and schools will expend more on transportation services, instead of books and learning materials.

The proposed school closings coincide with austerity measures certified in the most recent Fiscal Plan[1]: deep cuts to public services, an overhaul of workforce benefits, and dangerous reductions to retirement benefits. It is easy to empathize with families that have chosen to mobilize to areas with reliable electricity and access to more generous Federal benefits. The claim that closing these schools will yield the island an additional $150 million[2] a year does not seem realistic given that currently, 50 previously closed schools are being leased for $1 per year.[3] In fact, research indicates that municipalities receive only a fraction of the savings that they budget when they close schools.[4]

The proposed closings also coincide with plans to allow 80 charter schools to open, and public funds to be shifted to voucher schemes that will transfer these funds to unaccountable private schools.[5] This is unacceptable in a time of crisis and the closing of traditional public schools.

Puerto Rico’s public schools have been the institutions that offer children stability in the aftermath of a disaster and continue to function as centers of community. We call on your Administration to institute a moratorium on all school closing until a full, fair, and transparent needs assessment is conducted and determines how to best provide Puerto Rico’s students with
an equal opportunity to education. The long term health and recovery of Puerto Rico depends on it.

Sincerely,

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress
Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
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Jimmy Gomez
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Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
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Joe Crowley
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Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Ian Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
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Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Marcia Fudge
Member of Congress

Jose Serrano
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Michelle Lujan-Grisham
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress
Tony Cardenas  
Member of Congress  

Donald Norcross  
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa  
Member of Congress