



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **The Puerto Rico Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Publishes its Final Report on the Effects of the Insular Cases and the Non-Incorporation Doctrine on the Civil Rights of Residents of Puerto Rico**

*Report is the Culmination of an Ambitious, Inaugural, Multi-Year Study*

On February 26, 2026 the Puerto Rico Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR), established in 2022, issued a [report](#) on the effects of the Insular Cases and the Non-Incorporation Doctrine on the civil rights of the residents of Puerto Rico. This report is the culmination of a multi-year study that included eight public briefings between 2023 through 2025 and the publication of four memorandums. The Committee, which is the agency's inaugural body on the island, is also the first USCCR advisory committee to publish its work products in Spanish and English.

The Committee identified a series of subtopics to focus each of its memorandums as part of this study. Each memorandum is based on testimony received by diverse sets of panelists invited by the Committee, which were comprised of subject matter experts and community representatives. Each memorandum contained in this final report center on the following:

#### **Memorandum I – General Overview: Part I**

This memorandum is based on testimony received at the Committee's inaugural, in-person briefing which took place in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico on May 10, 2023. It covers a wide breadth of perspectives on the historical and legal context of the Insular Cases and the U.S. citizenship of the residents of Puerto Rico, as well as the effects that past decisions continue to have on the quality of life of people impacted by the lack of full access to federal public programs, such as older adults, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.

#### **Memorandum II – General Overview: Part II, Economic Perspectives**

The Committee developed this memorandum as a continuation of the general overview, and it is based on testimony received by subject matter experts via a virtual briefing on September 14, 2023. With a focus on economic perspectives, the Committee highlights several findings and recommendations identified in the testimony as submitted by experts on the subject. Among the findings identified in the testimony by the Committee, it analyzes how the tax system has historically benefited certain economic sectors at the expense of Puerto Rico's sustainable

*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing an annual federal civil rights enforcement report. The Commission, by Congressional mandate, establishes Advisory Committees in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories. For information about the Commission and our Advisory Committees, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov) and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.*

economic development. In addition, it highlights the tax differences between Puerto Rico and the states and how a change in status could affect the economy in Puerto Rico.

### **Memorandum III – Federal Voting Rights**

The Committee held a series of virtual briefings on May 21, May 30, and June 4, 2024, to hear testimony on the right to vote at the federal level. The Committee heard from various academic and legal experts on this topic. Through this testimony, the Committee analyzes how the island's territorial status is a limitation when it comes to voting rights as well as strategies that can be taken at the federal level to prioritize Puerto Rico. The Committee also highlights testimony on its jurisdiction over local elections, the debate on various visions of American citizenship and cultural identity, and opinions on Puerto Rico having a political right to self-determination.

### **Memorandum IV - Access to Federal Benefits & the Role of Race in the Relationship Between Puerto Rico and the Federal Government**

The Committee combined two subtopics into a series of virtual briefings held on March 6, 13, and 14, 2025. Through expert testimony, the Committee heard about the lack of parity in federal programs, specifically Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Veterans' benefits, and nutrition assistance, and how this impacts vulnerable residents. The Committee also learned about official government data tools that exclude Puerto Rico and how this has conflicted with racial formation and identity over time, limiting an accurate understanding of the island's population and affecting the allocation of services.

The final report also conveys the Committee's Factual Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations.

Committee Chair Andrés Córdova Phelps stated, "This report reflects the nuanced ways in which Puerto Rico's status as an unincorporated territory continues to impact the everyday lives of the U.S. citizen residents of Puerto Rico. On behalf of the Committee, we urge Congress to use its plenary powers to address the Insular Cases and bring parity to Puerto Rico once and for all.

This study would not have been possible without the experiences and insights of everyone who attended our briefings and contributed testimony. I also thank my colleagues for joining me in this effort as the inaugural USCCR advisory committee in Puerto Rico."

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