

SENATE, No. 2656

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
218th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JUNE 4, 2018

Sponsored by:

Senator NELLIE POU

District 35 (Bergen and Passaic)

Senator NILSA CRUZ-PEREZ

District 5 (Camden and Gloucester)

Senator M. TERESA RUIZ

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District 19 (Middlesex)

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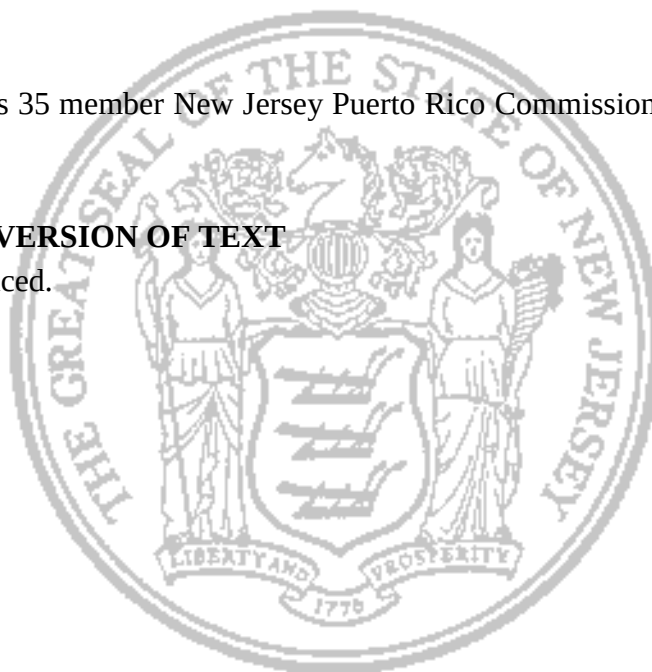
Senator Greenstein and Assemblywoman Quijano

SYNOPSIS

Establishes 35 member New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission in Department of State.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 11/26/2019)

1 **AN ACT** establishing the New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission and
2 supplementing Title 52 of the Revised Statutes.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

8 a. Approximately 5.1 million Hispanics of Puerto Rican origin
9 resided in the 50 states of the United States and in the District of
10 Columbia prior to the devastation of Hurricane Maria; and

11 b. The number is significantly greater than Puerto Rico's
12 population of 3.6 million, which was in decline due to out-
13 migration before Hurricane Maria; and

14 c. The storm made landfall on September 20, 2017, and caused
15 a degree of destruction and disorganization rarely experienced in
16 American history, so that months after the storm abated, many of
17 the island's residents still lack access to electricity and clean water;
18 and

19 d. Hurricane Maria was a worst-case scenario from a
20 meteorological standpoint, as the center of the huge Category 5
21 hurricane passed directly over Puerto Rico with wind and rain
22 lasting over 30 hours; and

23 e. Hurricane Maria exhibited many of the elements of a
24 catastrophic event, not just a disaster, as catastrophic events are
25 rarer than disasters because they result in the destruction of critical
26 infrastructure over a large swath of land, which is exactly what
27 happened in Puerto Rico; and

28 f. Though the true extent of Hurricane Maria's damage to
29 Puerto Rico is still being assessed, there are some indications of
30 what the long term effects of it will be, including: predictions that
31 the island's economy will shrink by about eight percent in 2018,
32 thus making Puerto Rico among the slowest growing economies in
33 the world; thousands of businesses have been unable to open due to
34 continuing electrical blackouts months after the storm; and over
35 200,000 people have left the island; and

36 g. Approximately 500,000 persons of Puerto Rican descent live
37 in New Jersey, which is the third-largest Puerto Rican population of
38 any state, and it is estimated that approximately 30,000 displaced
39 Puerto Ricans have come to New Jersey in the wake of Hurricane
40 Maria; and

41 h. New Jersey recognizes its moral obligation to provide relief
42 to all Americans in distress who come to our State; and

43 i. This State is committed to contributing to the stabilization of
44 Puerto Rico, so that those who wish to return to their homes on the
45 island will have an opportunity to do so and to find a safe, stable,
46 and sustainable environment in which they can raise a family,
47 educate their children, find gainful employment, and enjoy a level

1 of services similar in quality to those with which New Jersey is
2 blessed.

3

4 2. a. There is established in, but not of, the Department of
5 State the New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission. The commission
6 shall consist of 35 members, to be appointed as follows.

7 Two members of the Legislature shall be appointed by the
8 President of the Senate, neither of whom shall be members of the
9 same political party; and two members of the Legislature shall be
10 appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, neither of
11 whom shall be members of the same political party. The legislative
12 members of the commission shall serve during the two year
13 legislative term in which the appointments are made.

14 Thirty one members of the commission shall be appointed by the
15 Governor. Sixteen members shall serve for a term of three years
16 and 15 shall serve for a term of four years. The 31 members thus
17 appointed shall include at least one representative from: a State
18 institution of higher education; an electric or gas public utility; the
19 HealthCare Institute of New Jersey, or its successor organization;
20 the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, or its successor
21 organization; and at least two representatives recommended by the
22 Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico neither of whom
23 shall be members of the same political party.

24 b. All appointments shall be made no later than 90 days
25 following the day of enactment of P.L. , c. (C.)(pending
26 before the Legislature as this bill).

27 A vacancy in the membership of the commission shall be filled
28 in the same manner as the original appointment was made.

29 c. Members of the commission shall serve without
30 compensation but may be reimbursed for expenses actually incurred
31 in the performance of their duties, within the limit of funds
32 appropriated to the commission or otherwise made available to it
33 for its purposes.

34 d. The commission shall meet and hold hearings at the places it
35 designates throughout the State.

36

37 3. The Governor shall designate a chairperson or co-
38 chairpersons from among the members of the commission, who
39 shall serve in that capacity at the pleasure of the Governor. The
40 chairperson or co-chairpersons, as appropriate, shall appoint from
41 among the commission members the subcommittee chairpersons,
42 who shall each chair only one subcommittee. The chairperson or
43 co-chairpersons, as appropriate, shall serve on the commission's
44 Executive Committee, which shall also include the subcommittee
45 chairpersons and any additional at-large members to be appointed
46 by the chairperson or co-chairperson, as appropriate, from among
47 the members of the commission. The executive committee shall
48 schedule all meetings of the commission and prepare an agenda

1 therefor. A majority of the members of the commission shall
2 constitute a quorum for the transaction of the business of the
3 commission.

4
5 4. a. The purpose of the New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission
6 shall be to: advance bilateral trade and investment; initiate joint
7 action on policy issues of mutual interest to New Jersey and Puerto
8 Rico; promote business and academic exchanges between New
9 Jersey and Puerto Rico; support Puerto Rico in its efforts to
10 stabilize its economy; encourage New Jersey companies to invest in
11 Puerto Rico's infrastructure; and address such other issues as
12 determined by the commission. In order to carry out its purposes,
13 the commission shall establish subcommittees to examine the
14 following issues.

15 Economic development, investment and trade.

16 Research, science, and technology. A priority of this
17 subcommittee shall be to consider the desirability of re-establishing
18 the bi-state commission created in the 1990s under the auspices of
19 the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey to: (1) organize states that
20 are dependent on life sciences industry clusters to protect and
21 preserve a strong pharmaceutical industry in the United States; (2)
22 coordinate joint applications for federal research and manufacturing
23 innovation grants; and (3) create opportunities for university-based
24 research and instructional collaborations.

25 Public policy advocacy. This subcommittee shall mobilize New
26 Jersey institutions to join with other states in advocating for an
27 infusion of resources into Puerto Rico to stop its economic
28 downward spiral by: (1) making certain that Medicare/Medicaid
29 services are funded at adequate levels and on an equal basis with
30 other states in this country; (2) press for emergency education
31 funding to prevent the deterioration of the island's primary and
32 secondary education systems; (3) support the PROMESA Fiscal
33 Oversight Board in its determination to re-structure Puerto Rico's
34 debt; (4) support a restoration of the benefits provided by Section
35 936 of the federal tax code; and (5) promote federal funding to
36 reconstruct all of the damaged infrastructure on the island.

37 Education.

38 Infrastructure.

39 Such other issues as deemed appropriate by the commission.

40 b. The commission shall report its findings and
41 recommendations to the Governor, and the Legislature pursuant to
42 section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), within one year of its
43 initial organizational meeting and by February 1st of each
44 succeeding year for the activities of the preceding calendar year.
45 The report shall be in writing and include such recommendations as
46 deemed appropriate by the commission to effectuate its purpose, as
47 provided by this section.

1 5. The New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission shall be
2 authorized to raise funds, through direct solicitation or other
3 fundraising events, alone, or with other groups, and accept gifts,
4 grants, and bequests from individuals, corporations, foundations,
5 governmental agencies, and public and private organizations and
6 institutions, to defray the commission's administrative expenses and
7 to carry out its purposes as set forth in P.L. , c. (C.)(pending
8 before the Legislature as this bill). The funds, gifts, grants, or
9 bequests received pursuant to this section shall be deposited in an
10 account in the Department of the Treasury and allocated and
11 annually appropriated to the Department of State to defray the
12 commission's administrative expenses and carry out its purposes.

13
14 6. This act shall take effect immediately.

15
16
17 STATEMENT

18
19 This bill establishes a 35-member New Jersey Puerto Rico
20 Commission in, but not of, the Department of State.

21 The purpose of the New Jersey-Puerto Rico Commission is to:
22 advance bilateral trade and investment; initiate joint action on
23 policy issues of mutual interest to New Jersey and Puerto Rico;
24 promote business and academic exchanges between New Jersey and
25 Puerto Rico; support Puerto Rico in its efforts to stabilize its
26 economy; encourage New Jersey companies to invest in Puerto
27 Rico's infrastructure; and to address such other issues as
28 determined by the commission pursuant to its purposes. In order to
29 carry out its purposes, the commission is to establish subcommittees
30 to examine the following issues.

31 Economic development, investment and trade.

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33 subcommittee is to consider the desirability of re-establishing the
34 bi-state commission created in the 1990s under the auspices of the
35 HealthCare Institute of New Jersey to: (1) organize states that are
36 dependent on life sciences industry clusters to protect and preserve
37 a strong pharmaceutical industry in the United States; (2)
38 coordinate joint applications for federal research and manufacturing
39 innovation grants; and (3) create opportunities for university-based
40 research and instructional collaborations.

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46 other states in this country; (2) press for emergency education
47 funding to prevent the deterioration of the island's primary and
48 secondary education systems; (3) support the PROMESA Fiscal

1 Oversight Board in its determination to re-structure Puerto Rico's
2 debt; (4) support a restoration of the benefits provided by Section
3 936 of the federal tax code; (5) promote federal funding to
4 reconstruct all of the damaged infrastructure on the island.
5 Education.
6 Infrastructure.
7 Such other issues as deemed appropriate by the commission.
8 The members of the commission would be appointed as follows:
9 Two members of the Legislature would be appointed by the
10 President of the Senate, neither of whom would be members of the
11 same political party and two members of the Legislature would be
12 appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, neither of
13 whom would be members of the same political party.
14 Thirty one members of the commission would be appointed by
15 the Governor. The members thus appointed would include at least
16 one representative from: a State institution of higher education; an
17 electric or gas public utility; the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey,
18 or its successor organization; the New Jersey Chamber of
19 Commerce; and at least two representatives recommended by the
20 Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico neither of whom
21 could be members of the same political party.