

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5401

December 2, 2011

The Honorable R. Gil Kerlikowske
Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy
White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Director Kerlikowske:

Thank you for meeting with me on November 30th to discuss drug-related violence in Puerto Rico. I appreciate your commitment to focus the federal government's attention and resources on this problem. The lives of too many U.S. citizens are at stake for the status quo to continue.

Stated simply, I believe the Administration must significantly strengthen its approach to fighting violence in Puerto Rico that is associated with the trafficking of drugs through the Caribbean. As the U.S. Attorney in Miami recently warned, the federal government's efforts to prevent traffickers from transporting drugs across our nation's southwest border is creating a "balloon effect," whereby traffickers are increasingly turning to the Caribbean region as a route for shipping drugs into the United States. As a result, while the national homicide rate has declined substantially in recent decades, the number of murders committed on the Island has remained unacceptably high. I know you share my view that violent crime exacts a terrible price. Its costs are measured not only in the number of lives lost, but in the number of citizens who live in fear that they, or someone they love, might become the next victim. I know you also share my view that, from the perspective of the federal government, the death of an American citizen in Puerto Rico is of no less consequence than the death of an American citizen in Florida, Texas, or New York.

The level of drug-related violence in Puerto Rico is as severe as—if not more severe than—any other U.S. jurisdiction, including the U.S. states along the southwest border. Yet, on multiple occasions, this Congress has expressed its deep concern about the level of resources that the component agencies of the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland are devoting to the Caribbean region. Earlier this year, the House Appropriations Committee directed the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to "prioritize resources for law enforcement activities . . . in . . . the Caribbean."¹ The Committee also directed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to brief the Committee "on its efforts to counter the illicit trafficking of drugs" in the Caribbean and on how ICE is devoting sufficient resources "to satisfy its mission requirements in this region."² In addition, the Committee expressed its expectation that U.S.

¹ H.R. REP. NO. 112-169, at 55 (2011).

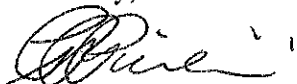
² H.R. REP. NO. 112-91, at 51 (2011).

Customs and Border Protection will appropriately position assets and resources in the Caribbean and noted that concerns have been raised about whether the agency is fulfilling its mission in that respect.³ Most recently, the House passed H.R. 2838, the *Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2011*, which directed the Coast Guard to submit a report on the adequacy of its drug interdiction efforts in the Caribbean basin.⁴ This language builds upon the House Appropriations Committee's earlier direction to the Coast Guard to report on the number of maritime surveillance hours and assets it has dedicated to countering illicit drug trafficking in the Caribbean.⁵

I respectfully propose that the federal government establish a "Caribbean Border Initiative," modeled after the successful Southwest Border Initiative that was created by the Administration in March 2009. The announcement of such an Initiative would demonstrate the federal government's commitment to doing everything in its power to address this urgent problem. However, a Caribbean Border Initiative will only be successful if the rhetoric is matched by concrete action. When Secretary Janet Napolitano announced the Southwest Border Initiative, she redeployed a total of 360 officers and agents to the U.S.-Mexican border and to Mexico. This resulted in the doubling—or even tripling—of personnel in certain federal offices along the border. The federal government should make a similar commitment of resources to Puerto Rico.

I will not rest until the federal government devotes the personnel, assets, and other resources that are needed to lower drug-related violence in Puerto Rico. I am eager to work with you to address this pressing problem, and I thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr., Attorney General of the United States
The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Cecilia Muñoz, Co-Chair, The President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's
Status
The Honorable Thomas J. Perrelli, Co-Chair, The President's Task Force on Puerto
Rico's Status
The Honorable Luis G. Fortuño, Governor of Puerto Rico

³ *Id.* at 47.

⁴ H.R. 2838, 112th Cong. § 611 (2011).

⁵ H.R. REP. NO. 112-91, at 73 (2011).