



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement and Questions as Prepared for Delivery
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Oversight Hearing
FBI Director James Comey
House Committee on the Judiciary
June 11, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Director, welcome to the Committee. As I did when the DHS Secretary appeared before the Committee last month, I would like to outline a narrative and then ask you to comment.

Puerto Rico is home to fewer than four million American citizens. In 2009, there were about 900 homicides on the island. In 2010, there were nearly 1,000 homicides. And in 2011, there were over 1,130 homicides, an average of more than three a day, the most violent year in the territory's history. In each year, our homicide rate was twice as high as any state.

Most murders in Puerto Rico are linked to the drug trade. Puerto Rico is within the U.S. customs zone and is used by organizations transporting narcotics from South America to the U.S. mainland.

Given the crisis, I examined the level of resources that DOJ and DHS were dedicating to combat drug-related violence in Puerto Rico and came away discouraged—because the federal law enforcement footprint on the island was inadequate.

I have done everything possible to impress upon officials the need for an improved federal response to drug-related violence in Puerto Rico, both for its own sake and for the sake of communities in U.S. states along the eastern seaboard that are torn apart by drugs that transit through the island.

Starting in 2012, my message finally began to register, particularly at DHS. The agency created a task force charged with taking steps to reduce Puerto Rico's murder rate. The Coast Guard has substantially increased the amount of time its ships and patrol aircraft spend conducting counter-drug operations off Puerto Rico. Last year, ICE surged 30 agents to the island, where they made hundreds of arrests and seized vast quantities of drugs and firearms. And CBP, once it assumed control of the counter-drug TARS program earlier this year, repaired the radar in southern Puerto Rico that had been rendered inoperable in 2011.

I know DOJ agencies have also enhanced their efforts, as the U.S. Attorney for Puerto Rico confirmed in a meeting we held earlier this week. I have been particularly impressed with the Illegal Firearms and Violent Crime Reduction Initiative, a joint DOJ-DHS effort now in place throughout much of Puerto Rico. I have also been impressed by other initiatives in which the FBI plays an important role, like the anti-carjacking initiative and the creation of seven strike

forces—consisting mostly of local vetted officers—that target drug traffickers and violent criminals in high-crime areas on the island, including public housing.

As a result of these enhanced federal efforts, the number of homicides this year is on pace to be 40 percent lower than in 2011. Nevertheless, Puerto Rico’s murder rate is still the highest in the country—averaging two homicides a day. Now is the time for the federal government to build upon its recent success, to redouble its efforts and not to relent.

And by the way, Congress has been clear on this point. The 2015 DOJ funding bill directs the Attorney General to assess the adequacy of current law enforcement personnel and resources assigned to Puerto Rico and to identify resources necessary to close enforcement gaps in future budget submissions.

I am told by reputable sources that, while the FBI does great work in Puerto Rico, there are not enough agents given the severity of the public safety crisis on the island. Would you comment on my narrative and tell me if the FBI will increase the number of agents it assigns to Puerto Rico, either on a temporary or enduring basis?