



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement and Questions as Prepared for Delivery
Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Oversight Hearing
DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart
House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations
September 18, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator, welcome to the Subcommittee. You and I met in February 2012 to discuss drug trafficking and related violence in Puerto Rico. In June of that year, we spoke again about this issue when you testified before the Crime Subcommittee. Finally, we spoke via phone in April 2013.

I have also spoken on multiple occasions with Vito Guarino, the special agent in charge of the DEA's Caribbean Division, based in Puerto Rico.

As you know, I have placed great pressure on DOJ and DHS to increase the level of resources dedicated to Puerto Rico, which is a major transshipment point for drugs destined for the U.S. mainland.

The need for federal law enforcement agencies to enhance their efforts in Puerto Rico is particularly important because, according to DEA, drug traffickers are increasingly using the

Caribbean region to transport cocaine to the States. In late 2013, DEA officials were quoted as saying that the percentage of U.S.-bound cocaine trafficked through the Caribbean had risen to 14 percent, which was double the percentage in 2012. Puerto Rico is an attractive jurisdiction for drug traffickers because the island is an American jurisdiction within the U.S. customs zone.

The role of federal law enforcement agencies is simple: to make Puerto Rico a less appealing operational environment for drug traffickers.

That requires the federal government to develop a comprehensive strategy and to allocate the resources required to implement that strategy.

In terms of strategy, Congress recently directed ONDCP to prepare a counter-narcotics strategy for the Caribbean border, with an emphasis on Puerto Rico.

In terms of resources: prior to 2012, I criticized the federal government for not doing enough. Since 2012, however, I have seen some real progress.

Make no mistake: the effect of these enhanced efforts can be measured in lives saved. Nevertheless, Puerto Rico's murder rate is still the highest in the country—averaging nearly two homicides a day.

While I know DOJ is doing great work in Puerto Rico, I have candidly told Attorney General Holder and FBI Director Comey that the Department must do more. This is not just my personal

opinion. In both the 2013 and 2014 CJS appropriation bills, Congress directed the Attorney General to assess whether there are sufficient DOJ personnel and resources assigned to Puerto Rico, to identify the additional resources that may be necessary, and to brief Congress on the findings.

In light of the foregoing, I have two questions for you.

First, what specific steps, including any new initiatives, is DEA undertaking to combat drug-related violence in Puerto Rico?

Second, I understand that DEA has incentives in place to encourage agents to relocate to Puerto Rico and to remain there beyond their initial period of service. However, I have learned from agents assigned to the Caribbean Division that there appear to be inconsistencies in how agents have been treated under this incentive program. I am concerned about the possible effect this situation is having on mission performance, and would like you to give me your views on the issue.

Thank you.