



**A Letter From Caras And Other Community-based Groups of Puerto Rico To The Honorable Orrin Hatch**

October 14, 2016

The Honorable Orrin Hatch  
U.S. Senator  
104 Hart Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

Thank you for the opportunity to communicate proposals for the economic development of Puerto Rico. We appreciate your interest and commitment, and that of the other PROMESA Economic Development Task Force Members, to engage on issues relevant to our population of 3.4 million American citizens.

We represent several impoverished communities (neighborhoods) of Puerto Rico, and other stakeholders, interested in the reduction of poverty and in the increased capacity of our constituents to stimulate and sustain Puerto Rico's economic development at the local level. Our non-profit-organization, Caras, as many others, is eager to continue having a measurable impact in our society and stimulate community economic development.

*Our Context.* More than 40% of our population lives in poverty. In fact, more than 700,000 people live in extreme poverty, according to federal standards. More than half of all children live in poverty, as well. Parallel, our public education system is dramatically failing our students. Our dropout rates are above 40%, and less that 40% of high school graduates continue their studies after attaining a high school diploma. As we all know, there is a direct correlation between poverty and education. We also know that we cannot depend on the government to provide all services, nor can the market provide all services. Civil action is necessary.



*Our Work.* For over six years, we have been organizing and empowering impoverished communities of the Metropolitan Area in order to achieve the self-management of their local development and reduce citizens' dependency on government services. Our public education system, as well as narcotics, crime, and unemployment, and other factors, is hindering our youth from gaining the capacity to become productive citizens who contribute to their own wellbeing and our collective development. Therefore, our key strategy for addressing poverty and stimulate local development is providing educational services through community involvement. Our work has provided great success in keeping students in school, engaging mothers in their children's wellbeing, and creating jobs.

*Our Proposals.*

1. Puerto Rico needs an education reform. The public education system needs to extend participation to the non-for-profit sector. We shared our comments with the President of the State Senate and the Committee on Education of the State House of Representatives regarding this issue.

2. While the education system is reformed, it is absolutely crucial to invest in afterschool programs. We have a great need for innovative afterschool programs, such as the ones we coordinate that integrate leadership, academics, emotional health and technology. Afterschool programs reduce dropout rates, delinquency, and provide support for parents who hold down several jobs. In addition, afterschool programs prepare our students for professions in key fields of economic growth, such as aviation technology and engineering.

3. It is imperative that strategies for local development be supported. We have a model that is impacting 10,000 people that can serve as a pilot project to be replicated elsewhere. Its key strategy is civic participation, and investment from the private and higher education sectors. Of course, legislation that enables these models is crucial.

On behalf of the Vietnam, Sabana, Puente Blanco, Juana Matos, Amelia, Los Filtros, and Pueblo Communities, the hundreds of mothers and fathers of our students, and our investors, volunteers, Board of Directors and other constituents, thank for taking the time to consider our comments.



It would be a sincere honor to receive a visit from your office so our communities and our work can be appreciated firsthand while we discuss concrete ways of stimulating local economic development in our region of others of Puerto Rico. You are cordially invited to visit our communities at any moment.

Respectfully,

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