

Mission Statement

*In July 2025, the President of the Puerto Rico Senate, the Honorable Thomas Rivera-Schatz, convened the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee. Its mission is to **identify and address the most urgent challenges** facing Puerto Rican veterans, **engage with communities and stakeholders**, and advocate before Congress for **service parity, timely access to benefits, and long-term support**. Guided by President Rivera Schatz's leadership, the Puerto Rico Senate is committed to ensuring that the **voices and sacrifices of Puerto Rican veterans are heard and honored**.*

**PUERTO RICAN VETERANS
FOUGHT FOR AMERICA. IT'S TIME
AMERICA FIGHTS FOR THEM.**



PUERTO RICO SENATE: VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Puerto Rico's Veterans:
Equal Sacrifice, Equal Service.**



GENERAL CONTEXT

- It is estimated that over 100k Puerto Ricans have served in the Armed Forces.
- The majority are over 60 years old.
- Face geographic and systemic disparities.
- Limited VA presence outside metro areas.
- Puerto Rico strives to be a veteran-friendly jurisdiction, offering opportunities that honor service while fostering a supportive environment for veterans and their families.

PRIORITY AREAS

- **Mental Health & PTSD:** Suicide prevention, culturally competent care.
- **Disaster Resilience:** Hurricanes/earthquakes disrupt services.
- **Women Veterans:** Need Dedicated Clinics and Reintegration Programs.
- **National Guard & Reservists:** Support smoother transitions to civilian life.

KEY CHALLENGES

- **Access to Services:** Rural veterans often lack access to transportation and healthcare clinics. There are 11 locations (1 medical center and 10 clinics) serving Puerto Rico and the USVI, compared to denser networks in the states.
- **Equality with Mainland:** Unequal services after relocation.
- **Economic Development:** There are several programs available for veteran-owned businesses.
- **Telemedicine:** The Rural Broadband Gap Limits Care.
- **Safety & Social Support:** Isolation, weak networks, mental health risks.
- **Pending Claims:** Over 40,000 unresolved cases. Even when wait time dropped from 388 days (2020) to 173 days (2023), it is still longer than many U.S. averages.

CALL TO ACTION

We respectfully ask Congress to consider the following:

- Guarantee **equality in funding and staffing**.
- Allocate resources to **reduce claim wait times** to U.S. median levels.
- Mandate **expanded telehealth** for rural areas.
- Include Puerto Rican veterans in **national resiliency planning**.
- Require **periodic reporting** and the use of equal metrics.