

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Equally American Urges Lawmakers to Include the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa in Supplemental Security Income Program

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In a release issued Friday, Equally American, a nonprofit that advocates for equality and voting rights for the nearly 4 million Americans living in U.S. territories, said it wrote to Chairman Richard E. Neal (D-Massachusetts) and Ranking Member Kevin Brady (R-Texas) of the House Committee on Ways and Means to urge their support for including the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa in the Supplemental Security Income program.

"The Supplemental Security Income program is a crucial lifeline for disabled, blind, and low-income adults and children throughout the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the Northern Mariana Islands," said Neil Weare, president of Equally American. "But otherwise eligible Americans living in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa are arbitrarily excluded from accessing SSI benefits. That is not just unfair and discriminatory, it is unconstitutional."

Mr. Weare added, "As the First Circuit recently held, there is no rational basis for categorically excluding otherwise eligible Americans from the SSI program simply because they live in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, or American Samoa. But Congress should not wait for the Supreme Court to affirm the First Circuit's opinion."

"Congresswoman Jenniffer González-Colón (R-Puerto Rico) has proposed a bill to include Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa in the SSI program," Weare noted. "Equally American applauds her bi-partisan leadership alongside her colleagues from each of the territories and urges Congress to enact this crucial legislation as soon as possible. Lives literally depend on it."