

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett, 12 Other Congresspeople Send Letter to Newly Confirmed Attorney General Asking Biden Administration to Support Equal Rights for U.S. Territories

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Merrick Garland was confirmed as the U.S. Attorney General on March 10, 2021.

Congressman Raúl Grijalva (D-Arizona), the chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett and eleven other House colleagues on Thursday sent a [letter](#) to newly confirmed Attorney General Merrick Garland asking the Biden Department of Justice to stop defending federal statutes that arbitrarily deny equal treatment to U.S. citizens in the territories in a range of federal

programs, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI), announced Equally American, a nonpartisan public interest organization that works to advance equality and voting rights in U.S. territories.

SSI is a vital safety net which protects low-income Americans who are aged, blind, or disabled from extreme poverty.

“I hope this congressional letter will encourage the Biden DOJ to take the position that no otherwise eligible American should be denied SSI simply because of where they live,” said Neil Weare, president and founder of Equally American. “There is no rational reason why Americans in those territories should be treated differently than their peers in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the Northern Mariana Islands, who are all eligible for SSI benefits,” Weare continued. “This discrimination is not just unfair; it is unconstitutional.”

According to the release, the Supreme Court recently agreed to hear a case challenging the constitutionality of arbitrarily excluding otherwise eligible Americans living in the territories from the SSI program. *United States v. Vaello-Madero* will decide whether such discrimination violates the Constitution’s equal protection guarantee. The Biden DOJ must now decide whether to continue defending the challenged discrimination.

“Equally American applauds Chairman Grijalva and his House colleagues for taking this stand, and we join them in urging the Biden DOJ to discontinue defending the discrimination at issue in *Vaello-Madero*, just as DOJ has recently done in an array of other cases brought by the prior Administration,” Mr. Weare concluded.