

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2026

Mr. Don R. Berthiaume
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Acting Inspector General Berthiaume,

We write to request that the Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) open an investigation into the Department's handling of a federal investigation in Puerto Rico involving alleged drug trafficking and election fraud. This investigation should include the Department's decision to not pursue charges related to election fraud, despite reported findings and evidence.

According to a recent report by ProPublica, federal investigators gathered evidence implicating inmates and correctional staff in a drug-for-votes scheme during the 2024 elections.¹ Despite the evidence, the Department refused to bring charges.² The resulting indictment charged 34 defendants with offenses including drug distribution resulting in overdose deaths, money laundering, and firearm possession, while describing the alleged drugs-for-votes scheme but bringing no election-related charges.³

Public confidence in the electoral system depends on distinguishing between substantiated misconduct and unsupported claims, and on applying enforcement standards consistently when credible allegations arise. That makes it especially important that decisions in individual cases are grounded in clear, consistent standards and applied evenly across jurisdictions. These allegations do not appear to have been generalized or speculative claims. Rather, the reporting indicates that federal authorities considered the allegations sufficiently credible to undertake investigative steps, including the use of subpoenas and the involvement of federal law enforcement personnel.⁴

This outcome contradicts the Administration and Department leadership's repeated emphasis on prioritizing election integrity and election security as federal enforcement priorities.⁵ The Department has similarly described narcotics trafficking organizations as threats not only to public safety, but also to democratic institutions and

¹ Rutledge, Raquel. "DOJ in Puerto Rico Halted Drugs-for-Votes Investigation." ProPublica, May 5, 2026.

<https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-doj-puerto-rico-election-fraud-prison-drugs-votes>.

² Ibid.

³ United States v. Juan Carlos Ortiz Vázquez et al., Indictment, U.S. District Court for the District of Puerto Rico, Case No. 3:24-cr-00432; Rutledge, "DOJ in Puerto Rico Halted Drugs-for-Votes Investigation."

⁴ Rutledge, "DOJ in Puerto Rico Halted Drugs-for-Votes Investigation."

⁵ Exec. Order No. 14147, "Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections," 90 Fed. Reg. 13037 (March 25, 2025); see also U.S. Department of Justice, "Attorney General Announces Election Integrity Initiative," press release, April 2025.

governance structures where criminal networks seek political influence, protection, or leverage through corruption and coercion.⁶

These allegations arise within a broader context of recurring election controversies and public corruption scandals in Puerto Rico.⁷ The 2020 primaries were partially suspended and postponed after widespread ballot shortages and logistical failures prevented numerous polling locations from opening or operating on schedule, prompting Puerto Rico State Elections Commission (Comisión Estatal de Elecciones) to postpone the election in certain precincts.⁸ Similar concerns regarding the administration and integrity of the electoral process continued in subsequent election cycles. During the post-election canvassing process in 2020, questions arose regarding the handling and adjudication of certain vote-by-mail ballots. Concerns were raised after a number of ballots appeared flat and uncreased, which was inconsistent with the expected condition of vote-by-mail ballots after mailing and processing. The irregularities prompted public calls for further investigation into absentee and early voting procedures and contributed to broader uncertainty surrounding several contested races.⁹

Election administration issues continued into 2024. The integrity of the ballot-access endorsement process was called into question after a voter's digital signature was forged to list her as endorsing a political candidate she did not support.¹⁰ The incident resulted in a formal complaint.¹¹ The incident garnered media attention because the victim was related to the opposing candidate and a former governor of the opposing party. Separately, during the primaries, voting-machine tabulations produced discrepancies in which machine-reported totals were in some cases lower than the number of ballots cast.¹² This incident prompted the Puerto Rico State Election Commission to conduct an audit and reconsider its contract with Dominion Voting Systems.¹³ However, during the general election, the machines reported incorrect results once again, this time in connection with the Status referendum. The totals for Free Association and Independence were inverted, creating the false impression that support for

⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, "Nicolás Maduro Moros and 14 Current and Former Venezuelan Officials Charged with Narco-Terrorism, Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Criminal Charges," press release, March 26, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/nicol-s-maduro-moros-and-14-current-and-former-venezuelan-officials-charged-narco-terrorism>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ortiz-Blanes, Syra, and Bianca Padró Ocasio. "'Never in My Life Had I Seen This.' Puerto Rico to Delay Primaries amid Election Chaos." Miami Herald, August 10, 2025. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/article244839272.html>.

⁹ Rosario, Frances. "Manuel Natal: 'Yo No Sé a 29 Días Quién va a Resultar Electo En Esta Contienda.'" Primera Hora, December 2, 2020. <https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/manuel-natal-yo-no-se-a-29-dias-quien-va-a-resultar-electo-en-esta-contienda/>.

¹⁰ "Levanta Suspiciacia a Portavoz de La Campaña de Elmer Román La Denuncia de Viuda de Rafael Hernández Colón Sobre Endoso Falso," Radio Isla 1320 AM, February 8, 2024, <https://radioisla.tv/levanta-suspiciacia-al-director-de-campana-de-elmer-roman-denuncia-de-nelsa-lopez-sobre-endoso-falso/>.

¹¹ Primera Hora, "Radican querella por endoso fraudulento contra Elmer Román," February 7, 2024, <https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/radican-querella-por-endoso-fraudulento-contra-elmer-roman/>.

¹² Murphy Marcos, Coral. "Discrepancias En Primarias de Puerto Rico Ponen Bajo La Lupa a Contrato de Máquinas de Votación." AP News, June 11, 2024. <https://apnews.com/world-news/general-news-51cc02490b334c640a52fa91358284d0>.

¹³ Ibid.

Independence had surged to 29.52%.¹⁴ Concerns regarding election integrity were further compounded by reports that deceased individuals continued to appear as active voters in official voter rolls.¹⁵

Puerto Rico has also experienced repeated and well-documented public corruption scandals involving public officials, political operatives, contractors, and government institutions across administrations and political parties. Federal authorities have prosecuted officials affiliated with multiple parties for bribery, kickback, fraud, and campaign-finance offenses, including former municipal officials, legislators, and senior political figures. Most recently, former Governor Wanda Vázquez Garced pleaded guilty in federal court to a campaign-finance violation arising from her 2020 campaign.¹⁶ She was subsequently pardoned by President Trump regardless of the election-related nature of the offense.¹⁷

Taken together, these circumstances illustrate why credible allegations of election fraud uncovered through federal investigative work warrant serious scrutiny and transparent explanation. Public confidence in democratic institutions depends not only on rejecting unsupported claims, but also on demonstrating that substantiated allegations are handled consistently, regardless of the political actors involved. In that context, the Department's conduct raises questions regarding whether it consistently applied its own policies, procedures, and longstanding practices.

Accordingly, we request that you review the following issues:

1. Whether the Department's decision not to pursue prosecution in the matters referenced in recent reporting was consistent with Department policy, procedures, and longstanding practice;
2. Whether DOJ applied the same investigative and prosecutorial standards in this matter that it applies in comparable election fraud and public corruption cases in other jurisdictions;
3. Whether DOJ fully considered the broader implications of declining to pursue election-related charges including the potential impact on deterrence, public confidence, and efforts to combat organized criminal activity;
4. The extent of coordination, if any, between DOJ, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and other federal agencies regarding the allegations described, and whether any communications, referrals, or recommendations influenced investigative or charging decisions;
5. The extent of coordination, if any, between DOJ and the Puerto Rico Department of Justice, and how that coordination factored into decisions regarding investigation or prosecution;

¹⁴ Telemundo Puerto Rico, "Máquinas de Dominion invirtieron resultados de independencia y libre asociación," December 27, 2024, <https://www.telemundopr.com/noticias/puerto-rico/maquinas-de-dominion-invirtieron-resultados-de-independencia-y-libre-asociacion/2676159/>.

¹⁵ WAPA TV, "Directora de CPI revela datos importantes del hallazgo de miles de electores fallecidos activos," September 25, 2024, https://wapa.tv/noticias/politica/directora-de-cpi-revela-datos-importantes-del-hallazgo-de-miles-de-electores-fallecidos-activos/article_62cfedca-7b53-11ef-b6c4-371b810a1a63.html.

¹⁶ The San Juan Daily Star Staff, "Ex-Governor Pleads Guilty to Misdemeanor Charge," San Juan Daily Star, August 28, 2025, <https://www.sanjuandailystar.com/post/ex-governor-pleads-guilty-to-misdemeanor-charge>.

¹⁷ Sarah N. Lynch and Jennifer Jacobs, "Trump Pardons Puerto Rico's Former Governor Wanda Vázquez," CBS News, January 16, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-pardoning-puerto-rico-former-governor-wanda-vazquez-officials-say/>.

6. The extent of coordination, if any, between DOJ and Puerto Rico Commonwealth officials, including the Puerto Rico State Election Commission, and whether any such coordination influenced investigative or prosecutorial decisions; and
7. Whether any political interference, undue influence, or pressure from Department leadership or other government officials affected DOJ's handling of the investigation, prosecutorial decision-making, or the decision not to pursue additional election-related charges or investigative steps.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



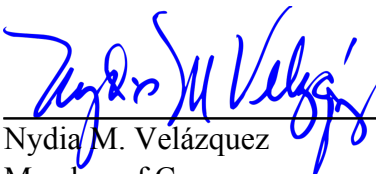
Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress