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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a comprehensive, culturally informed, and community-engaged study of gender-based violence in Puerto Rico, including its causes, prevalence, systemic drivers, and potential policy solutions, taking into account the island's cultural, economic, educational, infrastructural, and post-disaster challenges.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a comprehensive, culturally informed, and community-engaged study of gender-based violence in Puerto Rico, including its causes, prevalence, systemic drivers, and potential policy solutions, taking into account the island's cultural, economic, educational, infrastructural, and post-disaster challenges.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Violence Impact and
3 Vulnerabilities Assessment Study Act” or the “VIVAS
4 Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

6 Congress finds the following:

7 (1) Gender-based violence, including femicides,
8 domestic abuse, and sexual violence constitutes a se-
9 rious public health and human rights crisis in Puer-
10 to Rico, disproportionately affecting women, the
11 LGBTQIA+ community, as well as other vulnerable
12 and marginalized communities.

13 (2) This type of violence can take many forms,
14 including physical, sexual, emotional, and psycho-
15 logical harm.

16 (3) Existing data on gender violence in Puerto
17 Rico is fragmented and insufficient, impeding effec-
18 tive policy responses and resource allocation, in part
19 due to the absence of a unified and transparent pub-
20 lic data system capable of integrating information
21 across governmental and non-governmental sources.

22 (4) The role of local organizations and commu-
23 nity advocates is critical in addressing the crisis, yet
24 their contributions are not adequately documented
25 or integrated into formal government strategies.

1 (5) There is a pressing need for a comprehen-
2 sive, culturally informed, and data-driven assessment
3 of gender violence in Puerto Rico, including an eval-
4 uation of governmental policies, educational ap-
5 proaches, and community-based interventions.

6 (6) Such an assessment should include an inde-
7 pendent and thorough study on the causes, impact,
8 and systemic responses to gender-based violence in
9 Puerto Rico, with particular attention to cultural
10 context, economic conditions, infrastructure chal-
11 lenges, and the role of local organizations, in order
12 to effectively inform Federal and local policy and
13 programming, as well as sustainable investments in
14 reliable, publicly accessible data systems.

15 **SEC. 3. COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON GENDER-BASED VIO-**
16 **LENCE IN PUERTO RICO.**

17 (a) COMPTROLLER GENERAL.—The Comptroller
18 General of the United States shall conduct a comprehen-
19 sive study on gender-based violence in Puerto Rico. The
20 study shall assess each of the following:

21 (1) The prevalence, severity, and types of gen-
22 der violence across Puerto Rico, disaggregated by
23 demographic and geographic factors, including—

24 (A) detailed analysis of methods and pat-
25 terns of violence (e.g., physical force, weapons,

1 coercive control, economic dependence, digital
2 abuse);

3 (B) the settings in which violence occurs
4 (e.g., home, workplace, public space); and

5 (C) the relationship between victim and
6 perpetrator.

7 (2) Historical and recent trends, including
8 changes after—

9 (A) natural disasters (such as hurricanes
10 Maria and Fiona);

11 (B) economic crises and austerity meas-
12 ures; and

13 (C) the COVID–19 pandemic.

14 (3) The manner and extent of the effects on the
15 prevalence, severity, and types of gender violence of
16 cultural norms, structural poverty and economic de-
17 pendency, gender identity and sexual orientation,
18 educational disparities and unemployment, inad-
19 equate transportation, housing, utility infrastruc-
20 ture, climate vulnerability and disaster risk, and
21 other factors the Comptroller General may deter-
22 mine relevant.

23 (4) Institutional response and capacity, includ-
24 ing with respect to—

25 (A) law enforcement and judicial practices;

- 1 (B) health and social service systems;
- 2 (C) shelter access and emergency housing;
- 3 (D) access to mental health and trauma
- 4 care; and
- 5 (E) and substance use disorder treatment.

6 (5) Barriers to prevention, protection, and jus-
7 tice, such as under-reporting due to stigma and fear,
8 inaccessibility of services in rural areas, police and
9 prosecutorial shortcomings, or lack of culturally
10 competent or trauma-informed services.

11 (6) The intersection of disaster events and gen-
12 der violence, including the role of infrastructure col-
13 lapse, displacement, and stressors in exacerbating vi-
14 olence and levels of access to shelters and services
15 during and after disasters.

16 (7) Data infrastructure and reporting systems,
17 including:

18 (A) existing Federal, Commonwealth, and
19 local data systems;

20 (B) gaps in reporting, accuracy, and demo-
21 graphic disaggregation; and

22 (C) recommendations to improve data col-
23 lection and transparency, including evaluation
24 of the creation and implementation of a publicly
25 accessible data system with clear standards for

1 integration of governmental and civil-society-
2 generated information.

3 (8) Public access to femicide-related data and
4 case updates, judicial outcomes and impunity rates,
5 and Government accountability mechanisms and
6 oversight, including current barriers to timely public
7 disclosure and transparency.

8 (b) ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS.—

9 (1) ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT ANALYSIS.—The
10 study required by subsection (a) shall also include—

11 (A) an examination of the reach of local
12 interventions, the way local organizations and
13 interventions work to fill systemic gaps to fill
14 systemic gaps, and challenges in sustainability,
15 infrastructure, and funding; and

16 (B) recommendations for—

17 (i) increasing support and additional
18 funding to local Puerto Rican organiza-
19 tions;

20 (ii) improving coordination between
21 local, Commonwealth, and Federal entities;

22 (iii) protecting grassroots leadership
23 and survivor-centered solutions; and

24 (iv) ensuring disaster-resilient service
25 delivery.

1 (2) ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE
2 TO FEMICIDE.—Upon concluding the study required
3 by subsection (a), the Comptroller General shall
4 evaluate—

5 (A) the Puerto Rican Government’s cur-
6 rent policies and institutional strategies to pre-
7 vent femicide and gender-based violence, with
8 emphasis on analyzing—

- 9 (i) public education campaigns;
10 (ii) strategic plans and executive or-
11 ders; and
12 (iii) budget allocations and implemen-
13 tation status;

14 (B) the effectiveness of education-focused
15 governmental initiatives compared to—

- 16 (i) law enforcement reform;
17 (ii) survivor services and safe housing;
18 (iii) judicial accountability; or
19 (iv) mental health and trauma sup-
20 port;

21 (C) the extent to which education-centered
22 approaches address—

- 23 (i) root causes versus symptoms;
24 (ii) urgent protection versus long-term
25 cultural change; or

1 (iii) urban versus rural disparities;
2 and

3 (D) the results of input from civil society,
4 survivors, and impacted communities on effective-
5 ness, gaps, delays or displacement of inter-
6 ventions, including cases where civil society
7 data or monitoring efforts identify inconsisten-
8 cies with official reporting.

9 (c) INCLUSION OF LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND COM-
10 MUNITY PARTICIPANTS.—In carrying out the study re-
11 quired by subsection (a), the Comptroller General shall—

12 (1) actively engage with Puerto Rican local or-
13 ganizations, such as—

14 (A) women’s organizations and shelters;

15 (B) LGBTQ+ advocacy groups;

16 (C) survivor-led initiatives;

17 (D) youth and disability rights advocates;

18 and

19 (E) academic institutions and researchers
20 including entities that maintain independent
21 monitoring or data-collection initiatives in the
22 absence of formalized governmental systems;
23 and

24 (2) include as a part of such engagement—

- 1 (A) community roundtables and listening
2 sessions;
3 (B) inclusion in research design and data
4 interpretation; and
5 (C) opportunities for written and oral tes-
6 timony.

7 **SEC. 4. REPORT.**

8 (a) INTERIM REPORT.—The Comptroller General
9 shall publish an interim report not later than 270 days
10 after the date of the enactment of this Act, consisting of
11 such findings as the Comptroller General may have
12 reached, as of the date of the publication of the interim
13 report, with respect to the study required by section 3(a)
14 and the additional elements required by section 3(b).

15 (b) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 540 days after
16 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller
17 General shall submit to Congress and concurrently publish
18 in a publicly available form in both English and Spanish
19 a report that includes—

- 20 (1) all findings from the study required by sec-
21 tion 3(a);
22 (2) all additional elements required by section
23 3(b);
24 (3) disaggregation of the data and findings by
25 municipality in Puerto Rico;

1 (4) the evidence-based recommendations of the
2 Comptroller General with respect to—

3 (A) enhancing or supplementing existing
4 strategies to better balance prevention through
5 education with structural reform and direct pro-
6 tections;

7 (B) integrating education within a com-
8 prehensive, multi-sectoral strategy that incor-
9 porates law enforcement, health systems, social
10 services, and emergency management; and

11 (C) building transparent, measurable, and
12 participatory oversight systems, including
13 through periodic reporting, public dashboards,
14 independent evaluations, and survivor feedback
15 mechanisms, with particular attention to ensur-
16 ing sustained funding, public accessibility, and
17 long-term maintenance of any recommended
18 data systems;

19 (5) a description of mechanisms for ongoing
20 Federal and local collaboration; and

21 (6) any other policy, funding, data infrastruc-
22 ture or other recommendations the Comptroller Gen-
23 eral determines appropriate, whether addressed to
24 Federal entities or to agencies of the Commonwealth
25 of Puerto Rico, as a result of concluding the study

- 1 and analysis required by section 3, including options
- 2 for establishing or enhancing unified public data sys-
- 3 tem on gender-based violence in Puerto Rico.