



# MALDEF

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Representative Luis Fortuño  
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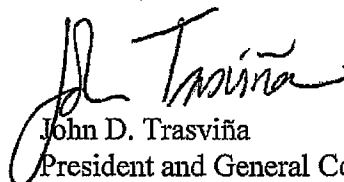
Dear Representative Fortuño:

Thank you for your letter inviting the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (MALDEF) to present views on H.R. 900, the Puerto Rican Democracy Act of 2007, bipartisan legislation to establish a process by which Puerto Ricans may make their preferences heard regarding the territory's future status. MALDEF is pleased to join other leading Latino organizations in support of legislation giving Puerto Ricans a voice on this question of fundamental importance to the island's future.

Over the past forty years, MALDEF has stood for the empowerment of the Latino community. H.R. 900 provides residents of Puerto Rico with the Congressionally-authorized power to decide the important question of island status. Under H.R. 900, Puerto Ricans would be empowered to select from among continued territory status, statehood, independence or nationhood in a free association with the United States. While the various status definitions and choices are constitutionally complex, island residents certainly deserve to be heard in this debate. To that end, we encourage the maximum level of participation in this question by island residents. Congress would be well served by holding a field hearing in order to facilitate that contact, communication and input.

Since 1917, Puerto Ricans born on the island have been granted U.S. citizenship under the Jones Act. Unlike other U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans serve in the military but are not permitted a vote for the Commander in Chief nor do they have full voting representation in the U.S. House or Senate. Ultimately, whether this is acceptable to island residents is up to those residents. H.R. 900 provides a concrete mechanism for their voices to be heard. We support this legislation.

Sincerely,

  
John D. Trasviña  
President and General Counsel

*Celebrating Our 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*  
*Protecting and Promoting Latino Civil Rights*  
www.maldef.org