

TESTIMONY
Before the
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
Hearing:
Building Prosperity: EDA's Role in Economic Development and Recovery
Tuesday, April 9th, 2019

Chairman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, Members of the Committee:

Good morning. My name is Rodrick Miller. I am CEO of Invest Puerto Rico, an independent, not-for-profit, non-partisan, private sector-driven investment promotion engine charged with promoting Puerto Rico as a competitive jurisdiction to attract new businesses and capital investments to the Island. I am here today on behalf of the International Economic Development Council, the world's largest professional trade association representing economic developers and the practice of economic development. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the important issue of economic prosperity post-disaster and the role the Economic Development Administration has in recovery efforts. I would also like to extend our congratulations to Dr. Fleming on his recent confirmation. As someone who has also recently transitioned into a new role, I wish him well and offer our support.

My first interaction with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) was post-Hurricane Katrina through the New Orleans Business Alliance for Economic Development, where I served as Chief Executive Officer. Hurricane Katrina decimated the city physically, emotionally and economically. At the time, Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst disasters our country had seen. In New Orleans, EDA made a strategic, multi-year investment in the creation of the New Orleans Business Alliance for Economic Development. This organization, which is a public-private partnership, is the lead economic development organization for the City of New Orleans. The New Orleans Business Alliance is a full-service economic development organization (EDO), which means it engages in many core economic development functions, such as business retention and expansion, credit analysis and finance, real estate development, marketing and attraction, among many other activities. Through the critical investment from the EDA and the activities of the New Orleans Business Alliance for Economic Development, the city has been able to rebuild and thrive.

From the perspective of economic developers, the post-disaster environment is not unlike that of other professions. It involves assessment, planning, and execution. The process is like most of our work: collaborative. We engage with elected officials, business and civic leaders. We often act as conveners to advance programs, policies, and projects that will lead to the retention and creation of jobs in our

communities. While healthcare, safety, and welfare action must come first following a disaster, economic developers are hard at work sometimes behind the scenes preparing for economic recovery.

Economic need following disasters can take many forms. From homeowners to business owners, there is an abundance of need, and unfortunately, much of it goes unmet for too long. From the perspective of economic developers, economic recovery need is no different. Considering the practice areas economic developers operate in – business retention and expansion, infrastructure, marketing and attraction, and so on – it isn't hard to see that need is both great and varied. Does the community have a current economic development strategy? Do we have the resources to connect with our businesses and aid them in the short, medium and long-term? How can we move economically critical infrastructure projects forward – sewer systems, broadband, ports, and so on – that are not part of the initial response, but are essential to economic recovery? What projects have we been putting off due to lack of resources that are now vital to restarting the economy's engine? Where will the resources come from to do all of this?

This is where the EDA comes in. EDA has invested nearly \$20 million in disaster supplemental funding in Puerto Rico, and this is just the beginning. The projects support myriad components of our economy through a combination of technical assistance and infrastructure work. From supporting local retail to building facilities to house incubators, EDA is helping to create a stronger, more resilient economy in Puerto Rico. EDA also supports the work of organizations like the International Economic Development Council. IEDC has for many years now participated in recovery efforts, including providing technical assistance and training, as well as marshalling volunteer economic developers like myself, who are eager to go to disaster impacted areas to help their counterparts rebuild. EDA, like organizations such as Invest Puerto Rico, can't do it alone. We need sustained, consistent input and support from our elected officials, from our businesses, and from those living in our communities. Economic development doesn't happen in a vacuum and succeeds most when everyone participates.

EDA has been a leader in economic recovery since the creation of the agency in 1965. It has aided communities in rural and urban settings with targeted investments that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of that community. It has worked in collaboration with other federal programs, like those at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Agriculture, Small Business Administration, Department of Labor, Delta Regional Authority and Appalachian Regional Commission, bringing their specific and unique expertise in economic development to leverage resources for better outcomes. These collaborations at the federal level are quite similar to those practiced by economic developers at the local level. We, too, work with partners in our city planning offices, our state housing authorities, our local workforce boards, our utilities, our educators, and anyone else that has a role to play in economic well-being.

EDA is an agency that, as its primary purpose, helps communities recover from economic distress. They are the experts in economic recovery and resiliency at the federal level. As this body considers both future disaster roles and statutory reauthorization of the agency, I encourage you to engage with the economic developers in your communities. Hear from them about how EDA's investments have worked. Hear also from them how EDA can do more – from defederalizing Revolving Loan Funds to supporting greater integration and collaboration across federal agencies. Given the tools and support necessary, the EDA can play a larger role in assisting communities recovering from disasters and economic distress and allow our country to build back a stronger, more resilient economy. I am confident that you will hear that my experience in New Orleans, and now Puerto Rico, is not unique and that EDA is more than worthy of your continued support.

Thank you.