

Puerto Rico | Puerto Ricans in Connecticut

Summit Program

Building a Collective Economic Agenda

Friday, 20 March 2026

Room 310, Capitol State Capitol, Hartford, CT

2nd Annual Puerto Rico | Puerto Ricans in Connecticut Policy Summit

Saturday, 21 March 2026

Connecticut Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT

Registration



Online Program



The University of Connecticut's Puerto Rican Studies Initiative for Community Engagement and Public Policy (UConnPRSI) is a research initiative seeking to document and support Puerto Ricans' vital economic, intellectual, and cultural contributions to Connecticut and provide research-based support for the development of public policies addressing the needs of Puerto Ricans in the State of Connecticut. Established in 2022, the UConnPRSI was initially funded American Rescue Plan Act funds. Since then, the Connecticut General Assembly continues to fund this initiative to support Puerto Ricans and others in the state of Connecticut.



Welcome

¡Bienvenidos!

Welcome to the 2nd Annual Puerto Rico|Puerto Ricans in Connecticut!

The University of Connecticut's Puerto Rican Studies Initiative for Civic Engagement and Public Policy (UConnPRSI) was established during the summer/fall of 2022 to strengthen the work of Puerto Rican elected officials, community organizations and leaders, academics and the state of Connecticut more generally with research based support. During the summer of 2021, State Representative Minnie Gonzalez approached me with a vision to create a Connecticut-based research institute that could do what the Hunter College's CENTRO: Center for Puerto Rican Studies had been doing under the leadership of its past director, Edwin Melendez.

The Puerto Rico|Puerto Ricans in Connecticut picks up the visionary work of the Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans conferences developed by Edwin Melendez during his tenure as director of CENTRO. This year we are bringing together a stellar group of elected and public officials, community leaders, scholars, journalists, and others to discuss pressing issues currently affecting Puerto Ricans and others in Connecticut. Unlike our prior meetings, which generally focused on discussing issues of general knowledge, this year's summit pivots to discussing current and future policy debates that will affect Puerto Ricans in Connecticut, in Puerto Rico, and elsewhere.

The 2026 Puerto Rico|Puerto Ricans in Connecticut is divided in two distinct sessions. Day 1 will focus on providing an overview of key economic research and information that can support a Connecticut|Puerto Rico Trade Commission or study group. The idea is to provide an overview of key economic debates about Puerto Rico that can help understand possibilities, challenges, and alternatives to support the development of a stronger economic relationship between Connecticut and Puerto Ricans. In addition, we hope that this meeting will open the door to develop alternatives to strengthen the Puerto Rican economy. Day 2 will focus on several ongoing debates affecting Puerto Ricans in the state of Connecticut. Our goal is to focus on the economic and material conditions that shape the contours of the Puerto Rican experience in Connecticut and elsewhere.

Sincerely,



Charles R. Venator-Santiago
Director, Puerto Rican Studies Initiative
Director, El Instituto: Institute for Latino/a, Caribbean
and Latin American Studies
University of Connecticut



Puerto Ricans residing in Puerto Rico and in Connecticut experience some of the highest levels of socio-economic inequalities. Contemporary federal laws and policies are likely to exacerbate these inequalities. This two-day summit seeks to retake the conversation on how to develop a Puerto Rican collective agenda that can counter the latter by discussing ways to foster economic sovereignty for Puerto Rico and develop policies to address the potential impact of the “Big Beautiful Bill” on Puerto Ricans living in Connecticut. The goal of the Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans|Connecticut summit is to provide a safe space for the discussion of policy issues and the articulation of community responses, to develop a collective agenda, that can address the particular experiences of Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and in Connecticut. We hope that this summit can help inform law and policymakers, community leaders, academics and the public more generally on the challenges and opportunities to for the development of strategies that can counter some of the persistent socio-economic inequalities that Puerto Ricans experience.

The summit is divided in two days. During the 2025 legislative session, Connecticut lawmakers passed legislation creating a Connecticut|Puerto Rico Trade Commission, to among other things, strengthen the economic relations between Puerto Rico and the state of Connecticut. Day one of the summit (Friday, 23 January 2026) will focus on a series of panels that begin to outline the challenges and possibilities for the development of Puerto Rico’s economic sovereignty. In addition, these panels are designed to inform members of the Connecticut|Puerto Rico Trade Commission, and the public more generally, about some of the economic realities and challenges that prevail in Puerto Rico. Day two (Saturday, 24 January 2025) will center on a discussion of potential impacts of the Big Beautiful Bill on the Puerto Rican residents of Connecticut. The goal is to propose strategies that can help mitigate the socio-economic effects of proposed federal defunding of various programs.

The summit is organized as a collaboration between the University of Connecticut’s Puerto Rican Studies Initiative (UConnPRSI), the Connecticut State Legislators Puerto Rican and Latino Caucus, and the National Puerto Rican Agenda (NPROA). Our goal is to bring elected officials, community leaders, and academics to foster a Puerto Rican collective agenda in Connecticut, Puerto Rico, and the United States more generally.

Context

- What do we know about the Puerto Rican economy and the socio-economic conditions of Puerto Ricans in Connecticut?
- What are key economic policies that can help improve the lives of Puerto Ricans in Connecticut and Puerto Rico?
- What can policies and community strategies do improve the lives of Puerto Ricans in Connecticut and Puerto Rico?

Friday, 20 March 2026

8:00-9:00am

Lobby

Coffee and Registration

9:00-9:30am

Room 310

Connecticut State
Capitol

Welcome Remarks

CT State Representative Minnie Gonzalez
Connecticut General Assembly

Governor Ned Lamont
State of Connecticut (Invited)

President Radenka Maric
University of Connecticut (Invited)

Senator Richard Blumenthal
U.S. Senate (Invited)

Resident Commissioner Pablo José Hernández Rivera
U.S. Congress (Virtual)

9:30-9:50am

Room 310

Connecticut State
Capitol

Strengthening Puerto Rico's Economy: An Overview

Professor Charles R. Venator-Santiago, Director
UConnPRSI

Goal: What is entailed in strengthening Puerto Rico's economy?
What is the goal of the summit? What to expect?

10:00-10:50am

Room 310

Connecticut State
Capitol

Opening Plenary: Advancing Sustainable Economic Development in Puerto Rico

Dr. Edwin Meléndez, Professor Emeritus
Hunter College, City University of New York (CUNY)

Summary: Pursuing sustainable economic development in Puerto Rico requires a reformist, evidence-based strategy that addresses structural and import-driven cost-of-living challenges—particularly in energy, food, and housing. Leveraging circular economy principles and maximizing local labor and resources, the proposed strategy would target local initiatives in energy, agriculture, waste recycling, and neighborhood revitalization. By advancing civic engagement and effective policy execution, the strategy aims to create jobs, reduce household costs, and foster resilient communities.

Friday, 20 March 2026

11:00am-12:15pm
Room 310
Connecticut State
Capitol

Contextualizing the Puerto Rico's Economy and Puerto Rican Migration, and the Puerto Rican GDP

Moderator

Ramón Borges-Mendez, Ph.D.
Department of Sustainability and Social Justice, Clark University

Panelists

Dr. José Caraballo Cueto
Understanding Puerto Rico's Economy
University of Puerto Rico

Dr. Carlos Vargas Ramos
Understanding Puerto Rican Migration
CENTRO: Center for Puerto Rican Studies,
Hunter College, CUNY

Luis Palomino
Towards a Puerto Rican GDP
UConnPRSI

Goal: What are the contours of the Puerto Rico's economy? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Puerto Rico's economic infrastructure? How can we understand Puerto Rican migration? What is the Puerto Rican GDP in the United States, Puerto Rico and Connecticut?

12:15-1:15pm
Room 310
Connecticut State
Capitol

Lunch

Welcome Remarks

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy
United States Senate

1:15-2:30pm
Room 310
Connecticut State
Capitol

What Federal Data is Available About the Puerto Rican Economy?

Moderator

Dr. Charles R. Venator-Santiago, Director
UConn PRSI

Panelists

Michael A. Lopez-Pelliccia
Economic Programs
U.S. Census Bureau

Mauricio Ortiz
Associate Director for Regional Economics
Bureau of Economic Analysis
U.S. Department of Commerce

Roberto Ramirez
Assistant Division Chief, Special Population Statistics
Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau

Goal: What data is available about the Puerto Rican economy? What do we know about Puerto Rico's GDP and GNP? What is Puerto Rico's trade with the United States? With Connecticut? What do we know about imports and exports to Puerto Rico?

2:30-3:15pm

Room 310

Connecticut State
Capitol

Connecticut | Puerto Rico Trade Study Commission

Roundtable

Commissioner and State Representative Chris Rosario
Connecticut General Assembly

Speaker Carlos Johnny Méndez Núñez (Invited)
Puerto Rico Legislature

Commissioner and State Representative Juan Candelaria
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Eddie Charbonier Chinaa (Invited)
Puerto Rico Legislature

Commissioner and State Representative Geraldo Reyes
Connecticut General Assembly

Commissioner Rubén Rodríguez
Puerto Rico Study Trade Commission

State Representative Steve Meskers
Connecticut General Assembly

Goal: What is the Connecticut | Puerto Rico Trade Commission? What are its goals? What does the commission need to know to develop an effective trade relationship between Connecticut and Puerto Rico?

Friday, 20 March 2026

3:15-4:00pm

Room 310

Connecticut State

Capitol

Closing Remarks & Reception

Dr. Charles R. Venator-Santiago, Director
UConn PRSI

Goal: What's next? Where do we go from here? What are our next forums?

**Fundraising
Reception**

6:00-10:00pm

1064 Main Street

East Hartford, CT

Puerto Rican & Latino Legislative Caucus Fundraising Reception

Saturday, 21 March 2026

8:00-9:00am

Coffee and Registration

9:00-9:40am

Public Hearing
Room 2C

Welcome Remarks

CT State Representative Minnie Gonzalez
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Matt Ritter
Speaker of the House
Connecticut General Assembly

Joe Rodriguez
National Puerto Rican Agenda (NPRA)

Dr. David Embrick
U.S. Senate (Invited) Director, Research and Community Engagement
Professor, Sociology & Africana Studies
University of Connecticut-Hartford

9:40-10:10am

Public Hearing
Room 2C

Introductory Overview

Dr. Charles R. Venator-Santiago, Director
UConnPRSI

Goal: To provide a framework for the summit - Why are we here today? How do the panels and breakout session structure the conference. Discuss importance of addressing core questions in group discussions: What do we know about Puerto Ricans in Connecticut? Explain goals for the conference and expectations for the future.

10:10-10:25am

Public Hearing
Room 2C

Break

10:25-11:00am
Public Hearing
Room 2C

Plenary Panel: Connecticut Puerto Rican and Latino Caucus

State Representative Minnie Gonzalez
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Geraldo Reyes
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Juan Candelaria
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Chris Rosario
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Antonio Felipe
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Aundre Bumgardner
Connecticut General Assembly

Goal: To provide an overview of what the Puerto Rican and Latino Legislative Caucus legislators are doing in Connecticut today and what are their priorities. What is key legislation that affect Puerto Ricans in Connecticut? What can policies and community strategies do?

Concurrent Sessions 1
11:10am-12:00pm

Concurrent Sessions

Concurrent breakout sessions promote active and deliberative engagement of multiple stakeholders in the solution of urgent social problems and add the development of community and policy strategies. The UConnPRSI, El Instituto, PR&LLC and the NPRA main goals as organizations is to cultivate relations with a broad constituency, which is understood to be essential to carrying our mission. For our purposes, we consider business, nonprofit organizations, elected officials, academics, the media and community leaders to be essential stakeholders to our mission. The breakout sessions are organized by groups that represent the existing organizational structure of the Puerto Ricans in Connecticut.

The common questions posed to breakout sessions are:

- **What can we do?** The groups will be asked to evaluate the potential for research and advocacy to have an impact on the definition and understanding of social, economic, and policy problems; the window of opportunity opened to policy and community leaders concerned with the implementation of solutions to the problem; and the likelihood of affecting public policies and mediating social institutions that influence outcomes for Connecticut Puerto Rican communities.
- **Who is going to do it?** The conference will help produce an inventory of resources, a directory of individuals and organizations that can collaborate in the near future (within the next year after the conference) to support projects that would result in relevant research, promote the utilization of that research by stakeholders, and assess discernable impact on social outcomes.
- **What can the UConnPRSI, the PR&LLC, and NPRA do?** Puerto Ricans in Connecticut have garnered more political power than any other state in the nation. Puerto Ricans in Connecticut have the highest representations of elected officials than any other state. This power has motivated the Connecticut Puerto Rican communities to engage in a broad range of issues and strategies all with the common goal of strengthening the voices of Puerto Ricans in the state. The UConnPRSI, PR&LLC, and NPRA could play a unique role as a convener and network builder, as a think tank and source of reliable information, and as a documentarian of the process.

**Concurrent
Roundtable 1**
Public Hearing
Room 2A

Fair Rent and Rent Control in Connecticut

Moderator

State Representative Antonio Felipe
Connecticut General Assembly

Panel

State Representative Juan Candelaria
Connecticut General Assembly

Wildaliz Bermudez
Executive Director of Fair Rent,
City of New Haven

Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno
State of Connecticut Commissioner of Housing

Chelsea Connery
CT Fair Housing Center

Goal: Two-thirds of Puerto Rican residents in Connecticut live on rental housing. New federal policies are likely to negatively impact Section 8 and rental assistance programs. This panel will discuss some pending legislative proposals to introduce rent control and other measures designed to create affordable housing in Connecticut. In addition, this panel seeks to examine the potential impact of these (and other) housing law and policy changes in Connecticut on Puerto Rican residents of the state.

**Concurrent
Roundtable 2**
*Public Hearing
Room 2B*

Puerto Ricans and Electrical Rates in Connecticut Roundtable

State Senator John Fonfara (Invited)
Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Aundre Bumgardner
Connecticut General Assembly

Volodymyr Gupan
Policy Director
UConnPRSI

Goal: The state of Connecticut has one of the highest electricity rates in the nation, yet at times it has exported about half of the energy that it generates. This panel will discuss some legislative proposals designed to reduce costs of energy purchases and affordability of electricity for Puerto Ricans in Connecticut.

**Concurrent
Roundtable 3**
*Public Hearing
Room 2C*

K-12 School Closures in Connecticut

Moderator

Chris Soto
**Former CT State Representative & Senior Advisor
U.S. Department of Education**

Roundtable

Cristher Estrada Perez
Board of Education
Hartford Public Schools

Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez
Founder
Lidera LTR Consulting

Millie Arciniegas
Parent University

Jose Ramos
School Governance Council Chair at
Burns Latino Studies Academy

Goal: Low enrollments in K-12 schools have prompted school closures throughout the state. This panel examines the debates for and against school closures in Connecticut. It also examines the implications for Puerto Rican families in the state.

Concurrent
Roundtable 4
Public Hearing
Room 2D

The Council: Working Towards Prosperous and Thriving Communities

Roundtable

Caesar Valentín
Social Equity Program Success
and Strategy Analyst
The Council

Jessie Coleman
Social Equity Program Success
and Strategy Analyst
The Council

Mariedy Collazo Cruz
Chief Program Officer
The Council

Brandon McGee
Chief Executive Officer
The Council

Goal: This panel will provide participants with information defining the Council and its mission. The panel will provide an overview of current programs and initiatives. The panel will also provide an overview of the Council's Community Reinvestment Program.

**Concurrent
Roundtable 5**
Public Hearing
Room 2E

**Latinas in Leadership Institute (LiLI): From Research to Action:
Leading with Purpose, Latinas Driving Change in Our Communities**

Moderator

Marilyn Alverio
Founder and CEO
Latinas in Leadership Institute

Participants

Christina Mercado – Health Inequity
Adult Education Instructor and Advocate
Bloomfield Public Library

Julia DeFeo (she, her)) - Underrepresentation of Latinas on Boards,
Commissions and Politics
Executive Director
Wilson-Gray YMCA

Cheila Serrano - The Unrealized Power of the Latino Voter
Director of Programs
Junta for Progressive Action

Jackie Santiago Nazario - Retreat Reflections
Chief Executive Officer
COMPASS Youth Collaborative

Sabrina Herrera
Latino Initiatives Editor
Connecticut Public

The Latinas in Leadership Institute session showcases the program's impact in advancing Latina economic mobility, career growth, and civic leadership. Graduates will present team-based research papers addressing key issues affecting the Latino community, with several projects having been published in industry magazines. This session highlights the Institute's role in developing a strong pipeline of advocates and leaders driving meaningful community and policy change.

**Concurrent
Roundtable 6**
Atrium

**Puerto Ricans and the Media in Connecticut and Puerto Rico
Roundtable**

Itzel Rivera
El Nuevo Dia

Rachel Iacovone (she/they)
Puerto Rican Communities Reporter
Connecticut Public

Norma Rodriguez Reyes
La Voz Hispana

Freddy Ramirez
El Show de Analeh, NBC-Telemundo

Goal: What coverage are Puerto Ricans receiving from the media? Partnerships like the one between Connecticut Public and El Nuevo Dia present Puerto Ricans in more complex ways and can foster more civic or community engagement. This panel examines how the media is describing the Puerto Rican experience and what is the impact of these approaches. The panel will also examine what role can the media play to address the potential impact of new federal legislation on Puerto Ricans quality of life.

Lunch
12:15-1:45pm

Networking Lunch

Wrapping Up
2:00-2:30pm

Closing Plenary: What Have We Learned, Where Do We Go From Here?

Moderators: Representative Minnie Gonzalez and Charles R. Venator-Santiago

Goal: In this session, moderators of each breakout session present a brief summary of conference participants' view on What can the UConnPRSI and the PR&LLC can do to support growing interest to support Puerto Ricans in Connecticut? What should be the priorities as conveners and network builders, as think tanks and sources of reliable information, and as catalysts of the solidarity movement? How do these roles benefit specific community groups given the state of their sector institutions and priorities as a social movement? Describe three issues that should be a priority?

*** NPRA is going to hold a hybrid (zoom & in-person) board meeting sometime during the Saturday afternoon – this will be open to public

For more information, please contact:

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University of Connecticut's Puerto Rican Studies Initiative

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