

Science Institution Can Help Alleviate Puerto Rico's Crisis—If It's Free of Political Interference ^[1]

Submitted by [Juan Declet-Barreto](#) ^[2] on 28 June 2017 - 4:17pm



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In the midst of Puerto Rico's most severe social, political, and economic crisis in its modern history, a public institution shines brightly to help develop the economy by advancing science and technology. The [Puerto Rico Science, Technology, and Research Trust](#) ^[3] is an independent, non-partisan entity that provides grants and infrastructure for academic and enterprise-focused research, fostering the business, environmental, human health, and biotechnology research communities in Puerto Rico.

The Trust has helped develop, for example, the Universidad Metropolitana's [Photonics Institute](#) ^[4], dedicated to optical sciences and engineering research, and the [Environmental Research Laboratory](#) ^[5], which provides valuable laboratory and analytics services in support of air, water, and soil environmental protections. The [Consortium for Clinical Investigation](#) ^[6], another initiative launched by the Trust, serves to facilitate clinical trials and improve human health through a collaboration between 22 research centers, including Yale University ^[7]. In the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship, [Parallel 18](#) ^[8] and [Colmena 66](#) ^[9] assist international startups seeking to launch in Puerto Rico with incubation and resources.

But the Trust's ability to fund research initiatives is under attack, and so is its non-partisan, independent nature. An amendment to the bill that created the Trust in 2004 was introduced and passed late last Saturday night—without a public comments process—through Puerto Rico's legislature. The amendment renders the Trust ineffective, as it rescinds the Trust's authority to fund research, science, technology, and knowledge production. It will also facilitate political interference to undermine the Trust's mission. [Chamber Bill 1122](#) ^[10], if signed by Governor Rosselló, will eliminate the current Board of Trustees and replace it with political appointees that the Governor himself will nominate and the senate will confirm. The bill will also change the term of appointees from six to three years, hindering the continuity of projects. But no matter who is appointed to the Trust's board, if the Trust can no longer fund scientific work, it will no longer be an effective organization to do what is needed.

The Trump administration's proposed budget cuts to federal research make it even more critical that the government of the Commonwealth takes action to protect science and technology funding. The flagrant attempt at undermining the scientific integrity of the Trust's mission and governing structure is at odds with Governor Rosselló's stated vision of maintaining continuity in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's agencies and dependencies as a way to minimize disruptions following general elections. Governor Rosselló is a scientist, holding a PhD. in biomedical engineering from the University of Michigan. Surely, the governor knows the value of a well-funded research infrastructure.

Research and innovation are two critical components that can contribute to solving Puerto Rico's grave fiscal crisis needs. Dr. Rosselló must reject this damaging piece of legislation that deprives Puerto Ricans of valuable research and technological innovation.

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