

Puerto Rico: Press freedom groups warn adoption of Senate Bill 63 would imperil public's access to information

We, the undersigned organisations, express deep concern about a new bill put forward by lawmakers in Puerto Rico that would limit government transparency and severely restrict the work of journalists. We call on Governor Jenniffer González-Colón to reject this dangerous infringement on the public's right to know.

Senate Bill 63 (SB 63) would amend Puerto Rico's [2019 law](#) on Transparency and Expedited Procedure for Access to Public Information, which standardized the process for information requests, as guaranteed by the Puerto Rican Constitution. If signed into law by Governor Jenniffer González-Colón, SB 63 would [add new restrictions](#) and layers of bureaucracy that would slow the release of public information at the taxpayer's expense.

If enacted, SB 63 would provide the government with new tools and mechanisms to deny the release of public information, effectively eroding Puerto Rico's tradition of transparency and seriously infringing on the Puerto Rican public's constitutional right to know – one of the strongest in the United States.

SB 63 would double the length of time government agencies have to release requested information, allow the government to classify information as confidential without judicial review, and eliminate personal privacy protections for those requesting information.

The bill would remove the government's previous obligation under the 2019 law to provide information in the requested format, making data analysis more difficult. SB 63 would also allow the government to deny valid requests because the information is spread across several documents or agencies.

SB 63 has been [fast-tracked](#) through Puerto Rico's legislature, with the Senate [approving](#) the bill in October without public hearings. On November 14, the [House passed](#) the bill at the tail end of its legislative session after only one day of public hearings, which were scheduled on short notice, [limiting the participation](#) of civil society. SB 63 is currently on the desk of the Governor, who has until January 4 to sign or veto the bill.

The bill is opposed by [more than 50](#) civil society organizations, Puerto Rico's [journalists' associations](#), the [Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#), [U.S. Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nydia Velázquez](#), and Pablo José Hernández, the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico.

It is the job of journalists to hold their governments accountable and the duty of governments to ensure their official activities are transparent and accessible.

We therefore urgently call on Governor González-Colón to reject SB 63 and reaffirm the importance of public access to information as a critical function of any healthy democracy.

Signatories:

American Civil Liberties Union of Puerto Rico (ACLU-PR)

American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA)

Amnesty International USA

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Freedom of the Press Foundation (FPF)

Free Press

Inter American Press Association (IAPA)

International Press Institute (IPI)

NewsGuild-CWA

PEN America

Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ)

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)