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Protest hits treatment of special education students in Puerto Rico and New York

written by Timón Committee, N.Y. Chapter
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Photo: Lorraine Liriano Iglesias

The Timón Committee of People and Families with Special Needs, New York Chapter, along with allied organizations, protested on Dec. 14 at Union Square in opposition to Puerto Rico Draft Law 1945, and denounced the treatment of families and children with special education needs both in New York and Puerto Rico.

Organizations from the New York area joined in solidarity with the Timón Committee, N.Y. Chapter, to denounce the living conditions of hundreds of special needs families in Puerto Rico and the United States, and to reject Puerto Rico draft law 1945 presented in the Puerto Rican Legislature. Timón Committee in Puerto Rico is an important instrument for defending family members and children with

special needs.

“The burden that the government imposes on parents and students of special education in Puerto Rico is unfair. The U.S.-Puerto Rico colonial relationship and the crisis this relationship creates was already complex. Now, new demands from the Financial Oversight and Control Board, which prioritizes Wall Street vultures over the most vulnerable, highlight hardships caused by the actions of corrupt and insensitive governments,” said Milagros Cancel, spokesperson for the Timón Committee, N.Y. Chapter.

“The 1945 draft bill harms the rights of students registered in the Special Education Program of the Department of Education (DE), and attempts to scale back provisions gained from the Puerto Rico judicial case of Rosa Lydia Vélez v. the Department of Education,” continued Cancel.

“The Puerto Rican diaspora opposes the draft law’s approval because it promotes institutional segregation instead of integration, marginalizes infants and rescinds rights gained through many years of struggle by mothers, fathers and caregivers. The bill excludes infants, depriving them of early intervention services. It also violates due process by prohibiting the request for reconsideration of decisions taken by administrative judges. The bill also politicizes the appointment of administrative judges by eliminating the judges appointed by the Department of Education,” said New York professor Lorraine Liriano.

According to Sara Catalinotto from Parents to Improve Student Transportation (PIST N.Y.), “This year, the Department of Education in Puerto Rico does not have the necessary budget, estimated at nearly \$550 million, to meet the needs of students with functional diversity.

“The crisis in services in the country is real. The ongoing cuts to public education on the island are so severe that they are causing a huge emigration of families with

needs, furthering the uncertainty in the lives of thousands of human beings. Upon arrival in New York or in other cities in the U.S., when these families request special education services, they discover that the system does not meet their needs. Our objection to 1945 is also due to the immoral competition for limited funds and services that it creates in Puerto Rico. Sadly, New York also faces cuts for our most vulnerable populations."

"The diaspora has joined with associations that represent the population with functional diversity in Puerto Rico in opposing the aforementioned law and in demanding emergency corrective actions in the face of this humanitarian crisis," concluded activist Milagros Cancel.

