

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 10, 2025

Honorable Brian Driscoll  
Acting Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
935 Pennsylvania Ave., NW., Washington, DC

Honorable John Ratcliffe  
Director  
Central Intelligence Agency  
1000 Colonial Farm Road, McLean, Virginia

Dear Acting Director Driscoll and Director Ratcliffe:

We are writing to you to formally request the declassification of all records, documents or information in any form regarding the murders of Carlos Muñiz Varela and Santiago “Chagui” Mari Pesquera. As two of the six members of the U.S. Congress of Puerto Rican descent and representatives of New York, which is home to the second-largest Puerto Rican community in the diaspora, we have a strong interest in the release of all documentation that could bring justice to the families of these victims of domestic terrorism. We sincerely expect that, after nearly five decades of impunity, your agencies will collaborate to lift any restrictions on evidence regarding the organizations and individuals implicated in these murders.

**Carlos Muñiz Varela** was a Cuban national who arrived in Puerto Rico under Operation Peter Pan when he was only seven years old. He was shot and killed on April 28, 1979, at the age of twenty-six in Guaynabo while driving home. Muñiz Varela was a notable political activist and entrepreneur. At the University of Puerto Rico, he held leadership roles in student movements that supported Puerto Rico’s independence,<sup>1</sup> joined the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) in 1976 and helped shape the Antonio Maceo Brigade in 1977. He was also one of the owners of Viajes Varadero, a business that coordinated trips to Cuba by Cuban exiles in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

His venture succeeded in a context where the U.S. had adopted a more flexible attitude towards Cuba, and the Cuban regime was allowing the entrance of Cuban exiles to visit their families. By the time Muñiz Varela was assassinated, his company had taken twenty-five hundred Cubans to the island. These efforts to strengthen ties between Cuban exiles and those living on the island radically clashed with those far-right Cubans who opposed any contact with the socialist regime.<sup>3</sup> Some of these opponents engaged in acts of political terrorism, including airplane bombings, attacks on Cuban and Russian ships, and assassinations, driven by the belief that these actions would help liberate Cuba from Castro’s government.<sup>4</sup> These violent attacks, mainly backed by

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<sup>1</sup> Muñiz Varela was part of the Union of Socialist Youths (JIU for its Spanish acronym) and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP). He also founded the Popular Socialist Movement.

<sup>2</sup> José Quiroga, *The Cuban Exile Wars: 1976–1981*, 66 Am. Q. 819 (2014), available at <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/553868/summary>.

<sup>3</sup> *Supra*.

<sup>4</sup> *Cuban Extremists in the U.S.: A Growing Terror Threat*, Nat’l Crim. Just. Reference Serv., <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/cuban-extremists-us-growing-terror-threat> (last visited Jan. 28,

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some Cuban Americans established in Miami and New Jersey, lead the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to name Miami the terrorist capital of the U.S.<sup>5</sup> Between 1973 to 1976, over one hundred bombs exploded in the city.<sup>6</sup>

Puerto Rico was not spared from these attacks, with Viajes Varadero targeted in a bombing attempt in January 1979, just three months before the murder of Muñiz Varela. Following his death, the anti-Castro group Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations (CORU) carried out two additional bombings.<sup>7</sup> However, to this day, no investigation has been initiated, nor has any relevant information been disclosed about the individuals the FBI has linked to CORU in connection with this murder, including Julio Labatud, Reynol Rodríguez, Secundino Carrera, and Osvaldo Bencomo.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Muñiz Varela's relatives and investigators from the Puerto Rico Department of Justice (PR DOJ) have faced an information blockade, which the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has justified by invoking exemptions b(1) and b(3) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).<sup>9</sup>

**Santiago “Chagui” Mari Pesquera** was the eldest son of Juan Mari Brás and Paquita Pesquera Catellops. He was shot and killed on March 24, 1976, at the age of twenty-three. His father was a Puerto Rican lawyer, political leader, and advocate for the island's independence. By the time Mari Pesquera was murdered, Mari Brás was leading the PSP and participating in the Commonwealth's electoral race. His mother was a professor, political activist and member of the PSP. Mari Pesquera was a talented young man who advocated for Puerto Rico's independence and environmental causes, and had just started his career as a commercial pilot.

By the time of Mari Pesquera's murder, the U.S. government and the Puerto Rican Police collaborated to harass, suppress, and intimidate anyone who supported independence for Puerto Rico. Due to his political influence and power, Mari Brás was targeted for decades, facing attacks that included placing bombs in his car and residence. Mari Pesquera's relatives consider his murder an additional act of reprisal against Mari Brás and his significance for the Puerto Rican independence movement.

Following Mari Pesquera's death, several events suggested police corruption, including the accusation and sentencing of Henry Coira in 1981. A few years later, the PR DOJ confirmed that,

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Perrottet, *The Long View: How the Fight Against Castro Once Terrorized U.S. Cities*, Am. Q. (Oct. 18, 2022), <https://www.americasquarterly.org/fulltextarticle/long-view-how-the-fight-against-castro-once-terrorized-u-s-cities/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Supra*.

<sup>7</sup> *Supra*.

<sup>8</sup> *Caso Carlos Muñiz Varela: El FBI Tenía Identificados a Sospechosos*, El Nuevo Día (Oct. 30, 2023), <https://www.elnuevodia.com/corresponsalias/washington-dc/notas/caso-carlos-muniz-varela-el-fbi-tenia-identificados-a-sospechosos/>.

<sup>9</sup> The first exemption covers information that is classified to protect national security, while the second covers information that is prohibited from disclosure by another federal law.

*FOIA Exemptions*, U.S. Drug Enforcement Admin., <https://www.dea.gov/foia/foia-exemptions#:~:text=The%20nine%20exemptions%20are%20described,disclosure%20by%20another%20federal%20law> (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

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given the circumstances of the crime, it was not possible for Coira to have acted alone. Evidence also implicated two brothers with the surname Verdut in the crime. Despite requests from the Department of Justice for FBI and CIA documents that could shed light on the case, both agencies have refused to provide information.

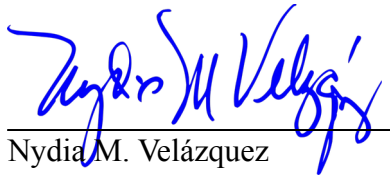
One of the main justifications for this refusal has been a request that the Puerto Rico Police made to the FBI two days after Mari Pesquera was assassinated, in which they asked the Bureau to exclude any information related to the Mari Pesquera case from the FOIA. Yet, in 2015, the Chief of the Puerto Rico Police Department wrote to the FBI, stating that 38 years after the crime, there was no longer any justification for the exclusion they had initially requested. They urged the FBI to allow full access to the information they possessed that could help clarify the circumstances surrounding the case,<sup>10</sup> but the agency refused to provide it once again.

We trust you recognize the urgency of declassifying and providing all pertinent information regarding the unsolved murders of Muñiz Varela and Mari Pesquera to the appropriate state agencies in Puerto Rico and the public. Furthermore, it is critical that your agencies grant authorization for the PR DOJ to formally interview the federal agents who were operating on the island at the time of these murders. Resolving cases like those of Carlos and Santiago is essential for the United States to confront and close a damaging chapter in its history. Your agencies must actively support the collection of evidence that helps identify and prosecute those responsible for these crimes.

Only this course of action will bring truth and justice to the families of these young individuals whose lives were tragically stolen for political reasons.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue. We look forward to your prompt and decisive action.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress

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<sup>10</sup> Superintendent of Police of Puerto Rico, Letter to the Director of the FBI (Feb. 11, 2015), in *Santiago Mari Pesquera*, [https://santiagomaripesquera.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=52:carta-del-superintendente-de-la-policia-al-director-del-fbi&catid=16&Itemid=224](https://santiagomaripesquera.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52:carta-del-superintendente-de-la-policia-al-director-del-fbi&catid=16&Itemid=224).