



Today, a group of active leaders of the Venezuelan-American community across the United States has joined forces to create the Venezuelan American Caucus (VAC), which will mobilize and organize the Venezuelan diaspora across the U.S. to advocate for a principled foreign policy that centers around humanitarian and democratic efforts in Venezuela as well as a compassionate domestic policy that empowers immigrant communities. As an organization, we will leverage the existing on the ground infrastructure built by Venezuelan grassroots groups and leaders to ensure that our Venezuelan-American community has a voice in the discussion, drafting, and implementation of U.S. foreign and domestic policies for years to come.

Since 2013, the Maduro regime has plunged Venezuela into the worst humanitarian crisis in Latin American history. According to the 2021 ENCOVI survey conducted by the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB), Venezuela, despite its wealth of natural resources, has nearly 94 percent of its population living in poverty and 77 percent living in extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup> As well, a 2019 report published by the United Nations' Human Rights Council detailed the dire conditions of the country's health system, citing a 2019 National Hospital Survey that found that between November 2018 and February 2019, 1,557 people died because of lack of supplies in hospitals.<sup>2</sup> This situation has worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a third of the country's hospitals reporting having no water supply and two-thirds having only an intermittent supply.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, 60% of hospitals reported shortages of gloves and face masks, 76% of hospitals suffered soap shortages, and 90% reported shortages of sanitizing gel.<sup>4</sup> Even more alarming, while COVID-19 cases continue to rise to about 1,100 new positive cases each day, only about 10% of the population has been fully vaccinated<sup>5</sup> as a result of a lack of planning and vaccine access.<sup>6</sup>

The members of the VAC have a long history of vocal and demonstrated support for a path to free and fair elections in Venezuela, seeking the enactment of policies to restore democracy, fight corruption and enforce human rights under the bipartisan VERDAD Act. To us, a departure from the idea of the use of force is critical. We are convinced that our focus should be to advance all efforts that alleviate the suffering of Venezuelans inside the country and abroad. Particularly, given the dire situation and our shared concern for our fellow

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<sup>1</sup> "Condiciones de vida de los venezolanos: entre emergencia humanitaria y pandemia." *ENCOVI 2021*, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. September, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "Under Maduro, nearly all Venezuelans Live in Poverty." *U.S. Mission to the U.N. Agencies in Rome*. August 3, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> "Venezuela's COVID-19 death toll claims 'not credible,' human rights group says." *The Guardian*. May 26, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> See above.

<sup>5</sup> "Venezuela has fully vaccinated around 10% of its population, doctors group says." *Reuters*. September 2, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Berg, Ryan. "Venezuela is without a vaccination plan." *Foreign Policy*. July 29, 2021.

Venezuelans, we join those on the ground, including well-respected NGOs and social leaders, in the search for swift solutions to the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis. We believe the international community, and particularly the United States, has a critical responsibility to put politics aside and deliver humanitarian relief to the people in Venezuela, with a special focus on those that are most vulnerable and live in extreme poverty.

In addition, we welcome the recent designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for over 300 thousand Venezuelans living in the United States, but understand the temporary nature of such policy. Therefore, we call on our Members of Congress to pass a bipartisan immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship to TPS holders, DACA recipients and others. Venezuelans have already significantly contributed to our local, state, and federal economies - as business owners, entrepreneurs, essential workers, and taxpayers. Our community needs a path to permanence in order to continue contributing to the American economic and social systems. We believe the time for action is now!

Only by joining forces and organizing our diaspora can the Venezuelan American community play an active role in returning democracy to our home country and improving the lives of Venezuelans living in the United States. This organization opens its doors to be an active resource for all those concerned about the crisis in Venezuela and its human impact. As a community, we are called to work together to empower those still in Venezuela suffering the dire effects of a totalitarian regime.

Join the Venezuelan American Caucus by visiting [www.venezuelanamericancaucus.com](http://www.venezuelanamericancaucus.com)