



## **LISC, Maestro Cares Foundation, Good Bunny Foundation and Cubs Charities team up to launch *Play Ball Again* to rebuild community baseball fields in Puerto Rico**

### **Music icon Marc Anthony, Latin star Bad Bunny lead funding**

#### ***Chicago Cubs star Javier Báez and UNICEF USA join effort to restore cultural hubs of PR communities***

NEW YORK (Sept. 30, 2019)—When Hurricanes Irma and Maria ravaged Puerto Rico in 2017, they devastated community baseball programs across the island, shredding more than 300 fields where young people once played and world-class talent had long been nurtured.

Now, music icon Marc Anthony and Latin star Bad Bunny lead funding for a new program called *Play Ball Again* to help rebuild some of those damaged fields and facilitate local programming for 17,500 youth. Organizers hope to generate “an upward spiral of opportunity” for local residents that goes far beyond the dugout, according to Maurice A. Jones, president and CEO of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which created *Play Ball Again* and is coordinating development work on the ground.

“Sports and recreation activities help restore a sense of normalcy, in the wake of disasters,” explained Latin music icon Marc Anthony, whose [Maestro Cares Foundation](#) is among the program’s earliest supporters. “Baseball isn’t just a game in this context. It helps young people do better in school and improves family life and health in difficult circumstances.”

Maestro Cares teamed up with the Good Bunny Foundation and [UNICEF USA](#) to fund the first \$300,000 of what LISC expects to be more than \$1.6 million in field renovations. [Cubs Charities](#) joined the effort with an additional \$100,000 in support, and the Kohler Company made a commitment to donate bathroom fixtures for onsite facilities.

All told, LISC anticipates funding will revitalize 25 fields, including sites in Vega Baja, Carolina, Yabucoa, Yauco, Utuado, Loíza, Caguas, and Casteñer. These communities represent a diverse geographic slice of Puerto Rico, encompassing some of the most concentrated numbers of youth players in rural areas, and those hardest hit by the hurricanes. Field repairs will augment larger community development work undertaken by LISC and local partners.

“Growing up on the island I spent a lot of time in some of these parks that are now destroyed,” noted Bad Bunny, whose San Juan-based Good Bunny Foundation is rallying support for the initiative. “In parks similar to these, a lot of great athletes like Roberto Clemente, Yadier Molina, Roberto Alomar, Edgar Martinez, and Ivan Rodriguez grew up. Our commitment is to rebuild these parks so that we can help new athletes grow. This is the first step for the rebirth of sports within the island,” he said.

Construction is underway on the first six fields, with renewed baseball programming in process as well.

“At UNICEF, we believe that play is the right of every child, and sport is a powerful tool that can build community and bring people together,” said Caryl M. Stern, president & CEO, UNICEF USA. “We are incredibly grateful for the support of partners like LISC, Maestro Cares and the Good Bunny Foundation. In rebuilding these fields, they are not only helping a community who has endured so much over the past two years, but also giving kids the chance to play and just be kids.”

“Two years after these devastating storms, the need to rebuild the island remains strong,” said Cubs infielder Javier Báez, whose family is from the Bayamón area. “Cubs Charities understood the need and has stepped up to the plate to help restore baseball fields and give kids throughout Puerto Rico the opportunity to play the game. This rebuild will make a big difference for the community, and I am proud to continue my efforts to restore the island.”

LISC has been working with a range of organizations to identify priority fields and outline redevelopment plans with community members, including local groups like Little League Puerto Rico and [PathStone](#), [Enterprise Center](#), and disaster relief organizations like [All Hands and Hearts](#).

“After the storms, we were the forgotten, rural towns,” said Rafael Surillo Ruiz, mayor of Yabucoa, who teared up as he spoke about the future of local fields. “To have an icon of a park being built *by* the community, *for* the community, and supported by all these stakeholders—it means so much for the spirit of our city.”

LISC expects most of the field renovations will be completed in time for the 2020 baseball season.

## **About LISC**

With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America – great places to live, work, visit, do business and raise families. Since 1979, LISC has invested \$20 billion to build or rehab 400,500 affordable homes and apartments and develop 66.8 million square feet of retail, community and educational space. *Play Ball Again* builds on LISC's significant expertise in financing recreational facilities and athletic fields in underserved communities, as well as providing technical assistance to advance youth sports, including a 20-year partnership with the NFL to create 350 fields serving 600,000 youth, as well as work with ESPN to reclaim vacant lots for basketball courts in 14 cities. To learn more, visit [www.lisc.org](http://www.lisc.org).

### **About Maestro Cares Foundation**

Maestro Cares Foundation is a nonprofit Foundation headquartered in Chicago and founded in 2012. The foundation aims to improve the quality of life of orphaned and disadvantaged children in Latin America and the United States. Maestro Cares Foundation works to achieve its mission by creating safe and healthy environments for children to live, learn and play while supporting their development and academic needs. The Foundation helps to raise the necessary funding to continue to grow their mission by collaborating with corporate and nonprofit partners. Since the launch of its first home for orphaned boys in the Dominican Republic in 2014, the foundation has opened youth homes, community centers, school, foster homes, and launched an educational program in Lima and Cusco, Peru. Altogether, the foundation has committed to 18 projects providing safe and loving spaces for thousands of orphaned and disadvantaged children in Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, Bolivia, Chile, Puerto Rico, and Chicago, IL. To learn more visit: [www.maestrocares.org](http://www.maestrocares.org).

### **About the Good Bunny Foundation**

The Good Bunny Foundation works to improve the quality of life of Puerto Rican youth through the support of youth arts and sports initiatives, in collaboration with other non-profit organizations. The Foundation led two relief initiatives providing aid after Hurricane María, which included the handing out of meals and the complete reconstruction of 10 homes. In 2018, the Foundation organized the first annual "La Nueva Tradición" event, in which 30,000 Puerto Rican children received gifts of toys and musical instruments. Currently, the Foundation's efforts are focused on the Play Ball Again initiative to restore Little League baseball fields in different municipalities of Puerto Rico.

### **About UNICEF USA**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in more than 190 countries and territories to put children first. UNICEF USA supports UNICEF's work through fundraising, advocacy and education in the United States, working toward the day when no children die from preventable causes and when every child has a safe and healthy childhood. For more information, visit [www.unicefusa.org](http://www.unicefusa.org).

### **About Cubs Charities**

Cubs Charities harnesses the passion of Cubs fans to improve the lives of children and families across Chicago and beyond. Cubs Charities' goal is to provide increased access to sports opportunities and targets improvements in health, fitness and education for those at risk. Through grants to quality nonprofit programs, development of parks and baseball fields, and other community initiatives, the Cubs and Cubs Charities help fulfill a commitment to be the best in the game, on and off the field. For more information, visit [www.cubscharities.org](http://www.cubscharities.org).

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