



State of Connecticut

Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

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Testimony of Werner Oyanadel before the Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, March 12, 2008 ~ 12:00 P.M. in Room 2E of the LOB
Subject matter: In support of H.B. No. 5916 & H.B. No. 5917

Good afternoon State Senator McDonald, State Representative Lawlor, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Werner Oyanadel, Principal Legislative Analyst for the State of Connecticut Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here to speak in support of H.B. No. 5916 (RAISED) "An Act Concerning Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements on Legislation and Certain Offenses Committed Near Schools or Child Day Care Centers" and H.B. No. 5917 (RAISED) "An Act Concerning a Department of Correction Advisory Commission."

Raised H.B. No. 5916 would require (1) a racial and ethnic impact statement on any favorably reported bill that would impact the state's prison population, and (2) reduce the minimum distance for enhanced penalties related to drug trade from one thousand five hundred feet to five hundred feet from a school, only when such school is open.

In specific H.B. 5916 proposes that the office of *Legislative Research* assist legislative commissions analyzing the long range implications of state programs, preparing summaries of government reports; informing legislative leaders of actions taken by the federal government and assist in the research of interim reports, contact potential witnesses, and assist the *Office of Fiscal Analysis* preparing racial and ethnic impact statements pursuant to other subsections of this proposal that deal with the impact of legislation on the size of the state's prison population. The LPRAC would respectfully request that the Judiciary Committee consider amending the date that this act shall take effect – from October 1, 2008 to July 1st, 2009 – in order to determine if the mandate could be performed within current appropriations or if the LPRAC will need to request additional funds from the legislature to accommodate this new mandate.

The LPRAC also supports amending – as recommended by H.B. 5916 – the drug-free school zone policy (CGS § 21a-278a(b)), which strengthen penalties for non-violent drug crimes committed within these boundaries. The concern the LPRAC has in regards to this policy is that in many urban areas, drug free zones are so numerous that they cover almost entire cities. These are areas normally inhabited by ethnic and racial minorities, which are punished more harshly than their suburban and rural counterparts for the same offense.

Finally, the LPRAC would like to comment on H.B. 5917, which seeks to create a prison oversight commission of public members, legislators and other advocates with the Department of Correction to review internal regulations and practices. The LPRAC is listed on this bill as a member and therefore would have no problem if the Connecticut General Assembly adopts this measure.

The LPRAC was created by the Legislature of the State of Connecticut through Public Act No. 94-152, taking effect February 1, 1995. LPRAC is part of the Legislative Branch and governed by Section 2-120 of the Connecticut General Statutes. The LPRAC is mandated to review and comment on any proposed state legislation that would affect the Latino population in the state.