



State of Connecticut
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Testimony of Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director of the LPRAC
Before the Public Health Committee
March 3rd, 2008 – 10:00 a.m. in Room 1D of the LOB in Hartford, CT
Raised S.B. No. 458, “An Act Concerning Linguistic Access in Hospitals and Diversity in the Health Care Workforce”

Good morning Senator Handley, State Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here in representation of the LPRAC to speak in support of Raised Senate Bill Number 458, “*An Act Concerning Linguistic Access in Hospitals and Diversity in the Health Care Workforce.*”

The law requiring that acute care hospitals undertake a number of activities concerning linguistic access in their facilities was adopted by the Connecticut General Assembly back in 2000. This law is being revisited, by Senate Bill number 458, due to concerns by many experts on this field that it failed to produce interpreter services to non-English speaking patients as proposed by its framers.

The LPRAC support Raised Senate Bill number 458 because we agree with the premise of the legislation, which endeavors to improve linguistic access services in emergency care hospitals. We believe that there is significant research detailing some serious racial and ethnic disparities in social health indicators across Connecticut including language barriers that support the revision of section 19a-490i of the general statutes, which mandated the implementation of interpreter services in acute care hospitals. The Commonwealth Fund, for instance, found that 44% of Latino adults report that they usually have a hard time speaking with or understanding a doctor because of language issues. A study conducted by the Hispanic Health Council found, “[*that*] the growing number of uninsured Latinos and the persistent lack of access to culturally and linguistically appropriate health care services are fueling a health crisis within Connecticut’s Latino population that is likely to worsen without substantial reform.”¹

In specific the LPRAC would recommend deleting the words “to the extent possible” from Senate Raised Bill number 458 (I.e., section 1(a)) in order to strengthen the compliance component of the proposed legislation. This technical change, in our opinion, would also allow the State of Connecticut to achieve compliance with of the Office of Minority Health (OMH) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which mandate language access services at all points of contact.

The LPRAC would also note for the record that medical interpretation could be funded through the state’s Medicaid program. Last year the Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor approved a budget that included \$4.7 million dollars for this purpose. Unfortunately, these funds are marked for deletion only a few months after they were approved. It is therefore, imperative that the Public Health Committee recommend to the Governor to withdraw her proposal to eliminate all funding from the recently adopted law on interpreters under Medicaid.

Thank you for your attention on this matter and respectfully urge your support in both the Appropriations Committee as well as in the floor of the House and State Senate respectively.

¹ A Profile of Latino Health in Connecticut, Hispanic Health Council, 12/06/2007, pg. 33