



**State of Connecticut**  
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Testimony of Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director of the LPRAC  
In support of S.R. No. 18 & H.R. No. 16,  
“Resolution Approving the Settlement Agreement in Sheff v. O’Neill”  
Tuesday, April 15th, 2008 ~ 2:00 P.M. in Room 2C of the L.O.B.

Good afternoon State Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann, and honorable members of the Education Committee. My name is Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here today to speak in support of S.R. No. 18 & H.R. No. 16, “*Resolution Approving the Settlement Agreement in Sheff v. O’Neill*”.

I believe it is very appropriate for the LPRAC to be at the forefront of any discussions on achieving a quality, integrated education for all Hartford children. After all, as of July 2006, Hartford had 2,500 newly arrived immigrant students (i.e., not from Puerto Rico) from 93 different countries – most came from Jamaica (777), Dominican Republic (173), Haiti (37) and Cuba (13) – although most of its non-immigrant students (96%) are either African-American or Puerto Rican descent. The 24,447 students enrolled in the Hartford public school system represent more than a dozen Caribbean countries and speak more than fifty distinct languages. This data is important because Latin American and Caribbean immigrants have the highest poverty rates within a city with a Median household income of \$24,820, an unemployment rate almost reaching 10%, and with almost 29% of its total population living in poverty.

As has been stated by the Commissioner of the Department of Education, “*Connecticut is a great state with a strong educational system.*” However, the state has an obligation to create a system that will reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation of students in the Hartford Public Schools; and in doing so the state may also close the education achievement gap affecting minority students while improving the performance of all students. In the Hartford school system, for instance, only 29% of students are graduating from High School and only 16% of those students are prepared for the challenges of higher education.

The settlement, which has been agreed to by both the state and the plaintiffs, and is currently being debated in this committee via S.R. No. 18 & H.R. No. 16 would provide state funding to continue to expand integrated educational options for Hartford ethnic and racial school children in schools that have a minimum level of racial integration. It also establishes a regional school choice office and requires the development of the first *Comprehensive Management Plan* to guide implementation.

The new Sheff settlement agreement, in the opinion of the LPRAC, represents a positive step forward in achieving quality integrated education for all students, which could potentially alleviate the gloomy statistics that were previously highlighted.

The LPRAC was created by the Legislature of the State of Connecticut through Public Act Number 94-152, taking effect February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995. The LPRAC is part of the legislative branch and is governed by section 2-120 of the Connecticut General Statutes.