



# State of Connecticut

## Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

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### Testimony of Ivette Servera, Vice-Chair of the LPRAC

#### Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

#### In opposition of SB 840 "An Act Concerning the Elimination of the Office of Consumer Counsel, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, the Office of Ombudsman for Property Rights and Certain Legislative Commissions."

March 16, 2009, in Room 2B of the LOB ~ 9:30 A.M.

Good morning State Senator Slossberg, State Representative Spallone, and honorable members of the Government Administration & Elections Committee. My name is Ivette Servera, Vice Chairperson of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. I am here today to speak in opposition to SB 840.

In 1995 the Connecticut General Assembly had the foresight to create an entity that would give voice to a people, an organization that would bring to light the needs and concerns of one of Connecticut's youngest and most vulnerable populations.

The creation of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission gave hope to tens of thousands of underrepresented Connecticut residents who, for the first time, felt their voices would be heard in the halls of power and possibly shape legislation that would abate their fears, give them equal access to opportunity and improve their lives.

Today, those same people represent Connecticut's largest minority and the youngest and fastest growing segment of the population overall. Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Ecuadoreans, Dominicans, Peruvians, Colombians, Chileans, Venezuelans, Argentineans, Costa Ricans, Cubans. 17 countries with 17 distinct cultures. More than 403,000 state residents, nearly 12 percent of the state's total population, represented by a single commission with just six staff members.

In the best of times Latinos in Connecticut are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, a lack of access to resources, and disparities in health care and judicial prosecution. Now, with layoffs, cuts in benefits and services, and uncertain futures many are getting a clear picture of what it is like to be Latino in Connecticut every single day.

Since its creation the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission has stood firmly on the side of its constituency and fought tooth and nail for its protection and advancement, advocating for education and health care reform, equal treatment in the judicial process, equal access to opportunities for businesses, and immigrant rights just to name a few. To that end we've partnered with national organizations like ASPIRA and the United State Hispanic Leadership Institute. We've conducted and presented to you the only comprehensive study on the socio-economic status of Latinos in the state. We've created and hosted educational forums and conferences on HIV/AIDS, the mortgage crisis and financial management among others. In the fall of 2008, we partnered with Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz on a Latino voter registration drive that added more than 21,000 new voices to the state polls and we're working with Latino legislators on the first ever Latino Advocacy day.

Thirteen years ago, you made the decision to protect the state's vulnerable and to now remove the little funding given to agencies that serve and represent them is unconscionable. The fact that the Governor and the Legislature would consider such a move, at this time, is in itself testament to the need for this commission.