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Testimony of Fernando Betancourt before the
Human Services Committee
Tuesday, February 20, 2007 9:00 A.M.
Legislative Office Building, Room 2A
Hartford, Connecticut

S.B. No. 198 AAC the availability of interpreter services under the
Medicaid program
H.B. No. 6647 AAC Authorizing Bonds of the State for Casa Otoñal in
the City of New Haven

Good morning co-chairs Harris, Villano and honorable members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here to speak in support of S.B. Number 198, "An Act Concerning the Availability of Interpreter Services under the Medicaid Program" and proposed H.B. Number 6647, "An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Casa Otoñal in the City of New Haven".

S.B. 198 was referred to the Committee on Human Services by Senator Harp to improve efficiencies in the Medicaid program by allowing interpreter services to be a covered service, thereby promoting access to healthcare for persons with limited English proficiency. The LPRAC speaks in support of this effort because many of the people affected by the lack of interpreter services are Hispanic residents of the State of Connecticut. A recent study conducted for DemocracyWorks by the Urban Institute titled Immigrants in Connecticut: Labor Market Experiences and Health Care Access indicated that Latin American immigrants are the fastest growing and the most recent population of immigrants in the State. The latest figures show that 36% of Connecticut migration comes from the Caribbean, South America, Mexico and Central America. The report also shows that Latin American and Caribbean immigrants have the highest poverty rates and over half of Mexican



and Central American immigrants lack high school degrees. Two thirds of Central American immigrants – according to this report – are most likely to lack English skills.

Another study conducted by the Connecticut Health Foundation’s policy panel on *Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* calculated that more than 26,754 children enrolled in the Medicaid program in Connecticut speak a language other than English at home and that there are about sixty five different languages spoken by low-income Connecticut residents with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) – about half of whom are Spanish-speaking.

The LPRAC also would like to speak in support of proposed Bill number 6647, “*An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Casa Otoñal in the City of New Haven.*” This proposal introduced by State Representative Candelaria (D-95th District) would, if enacted, empower the State Bonds Commission to authorize the issuance of one hundred thousand dollars for rehabilitation and repairs for an organization in New Haven known as Casa Otoñal. The mission of this organization based on information listed on-line on the United Way website is “...[t]o create a community that functions as an extended family, providing a range of housing, social and cultural services to elders, families and children, with a focus on strengthening the Hispanic Community.” Casa Otoñal was founded in 1976 as a senior center and nutrition site by the City of New Haven and over the past quarter century, Casa has grown from a small group of Hispanic elders to a five property campus that provides programs to seniors, children and families ranging from housing, transportation, case management, health screenings, English and literacy classes, childcare development training programs for adults, and after school and summer programs for neighborhood children.



According to the latest figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Connecticut 2005 population estimate is 3,510,297 – an estimated increase of 3.1 % since 2000. The Hispanic/Latino population in Connecticut reached 10.9 % in 2005 and more than 21.4% are of Hispanic or Latino origin in New Haven out of 124,512 people. The elderly community in New Haven is 10.2 % -- that is persons 65 years old and over.

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.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony and I would welcome any questions that you may have on this matter.