



State of Connecticut
Latino and Puerto Rican
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Testimony of Fernando Betancourt
Before the Human Services Committee
Tuesday, February 26th, 2008
10:00 A.M. – Room 2A of the LOB

**S.B. No. 34 “An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget
Recommendations with Respect to Social Services Programs”**

Good morning State Senator Harris, State Representative Villano and 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 on behalf of the LPRAC regarding S.B. No. 34 “An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations with Respect to Social Services Programs”

The LPRAC is disappointed with the Governor’s recommendation to eliminate all funding from the recently adopted law on interpreters under Medicaid. This is alarming to the LPRAC because there is significant data available that has identified language among one of the most serious barriers to a quality health care experience for Latinos living in our state.¹ It is clear that the inability for people to communicate with a health provider may have serious or fatal results; in Connecticut this is more problematic because there are more than 22,000 Medicaid recipients with Limited English Proficiency within a state with a diverse foreign-born population at about 12% based on the latest data. It seems that both the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) and the Governor had already agreed that medical interpretation was an important tool that could be used to decrease the prevailing ethnic and racial health disparities in Connecticut, which is presumably why it was signed into law several months ago. It is, therefore, the LPRAC’s opinion that the Human Services Committee of the CGA should reject section 1(b) of S.B. No. 34 which deals with eliminating the Medicaid state plan to include foreign language interpreter services provided to any beneficiary with limited English proficiency. In 2007, for the record, it was estimated that it would require the Department of Social Services about five million dollars annually to amend the state Medicaid plan to include foreign language interpreter services and 50% of these costs would be reimbursed by the federal government under the Medicaid program.

Thank you for your attention on this matter.

¹ A Profile of Latino Health in Connecticut, Hispanic Health Council, December 2006