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Latino and Puerto Rican
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Testimony Regarding Proposed Bill No. 5769
Monday, March 9, 2009
Legislative Office Bldg. Room 2B
Hartford, Connecticut

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and honorable members of the Education Committee. My name is Werner Oyanadel, Principal Legislative Analyst for the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. We are submitting this testimony in support of Proposed Bill number 5769, "An Act Concerning School Drop Out Rates,"

It is very clear to the majority of experts in the field, that if current population trends continue to increase, and policymakers do not improve the instruction of all racial and ethnic groups, the skills of the workforce and the income of all Connecticut State residents will likely decline over the next two decades. Connecticut, unfortunately, has one of the largest achievement gaps in the United States. In 2007 the Black and Latino Caucus reported that the State has made very limited progress creating standards and better outcomes for minority students. The latest annual high school dropout rate available for Latinos according to the State Department of Education is 4.4% during the 2005-2006 school year. This is more than double the rate among White students – 15.5% of the student population in Connecticut public schools or 88,537 children are Latino. More importantly, however, is to consider reviewing the graduation rate in specific cities across the State. For instance, the graduation rate in Hartford is a low as 29 percent and from that number those students that are ready for college is only 16%.

The LPRAC supports Proposed Bill number 5769, in that it would require parental consent to dropout of school to be eighteen instead of sixteen years of age. However, the LPRAC would ask for the implementation of the bill to be moved from July 1, 2010 to July 1 2009. The LPRAC, for the record, also supports the standardization of a formula for the dropout rate in Connecticut in order to create a reliable estimate of students that dropout of school.

The LPRAC is also monitoring the Graduation Counts Compact signed in 2005 by all governors of the United States. This unprecedented commitment by all governors created a method for calculating the graduation rate. The formula and methods agreed to in the Graduation Counts Compact moved beyond debates among national experts/researchers on which data and calculations needed to be taken into consideration to provide the best estimates. The LPRAC agrees with this Compact Formula (i.e., graduation rate = [students graduating within four years with a regular diploma] divided by [(first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier) plus (transfers in) minus (transfers out)] and the State of Connecticut will be reporting progress annually starting 2010.