

My name is Stephen Knight, and I am the treasurer of the Spanish Community of Wallingford. I am here with our Board president Maria Campos-Harlow and our Board secretary Trish Nunez-Odermatt.

The Spanish Community of Wallingford (Comunidad Hipsana de Wallingford), a non-profit agency providing social services to the Hispanic community, asking you to resist cutting the financial assistance that the State provides to us. Because of your support, we are able to provide critical help to a special group of residents anxious to participate in the American dream but facing a language barrier that makes achieving that goal difficult.

The goal of our agency is to provide the temporary assistance that they need in their journey to fully participate in and become productive members of the greater American society. That assistance takes many forms. First and foremost, we encourage our clients to become proficient in the English language through ESL classes that we either provide directly or introduce them to that are conducted elsewhere in Wallingford.

While our clients are in the process of acquiring a new language, however, they require the same services everyone else does, including medical care, employment assistance, legal assistance, housing, education and all the other services we all access. Consider how easy it is for us whose first language is English to navigate in American society because we can understand everything that is said to us or most everything we read. Then try to imagine yourself in, say, Bolivia, and – if you are like me, who is monolingual – you begin to understand that the language barrier is not just a communications barrier but a cultural, economic and education barrier as well.

Your financial assistance helps us help our clients to break down those barriers. Please let me emphasize that we view our role as temporary. There could be no greater disservice to the Hispanic community than to provide its members with an ability to wall themselves off from the rest of society. Our services are there to break down walls, not provide new ones. Ironically, our greatest accomplishment is to see people we have assisted no longer have need of our services.

Please allow this agency to continue this vital work. We are the ones providing the network that every previous immigrant group needed in their journey to full participation in American society. The large factories and ethnic service clubs that provided the framework of assistance to prior waves of immigrants are largely gone. In today's America, agencies such as ours are filling that void, but we can do so only with your help.

I would like to close my portion of our testimony by thanking you for the generous financial support you have given us for many years. I promise you that it has been money carefully and effectively spent making lives better. We hope you are as proud of what you have accomplished by allowing us these resources as we are in having helped so many achieve their dreams of being part of the United States of America and the State of Connecticut.

Words are important, to be sure, and I thank you for listening to mine, but we thought that you would understand our mission better if you had a chance to meet some of our clients. To that end, I would like to reintroduce our Board president Maria Campos-Harlow and Trish Nunez-Odermatt who will take it from here.