

February 18, 2009

Testimony in supporting Junta for Progressive Action.

Hello, my name is Ana Maria Ocasio and I'm 13 years old. Thank you for allowing me to talk this evening. I have been a part of Junta's *The Neighborhood Place* after-school and summer program for over six years now. I can personally say that the students who are a part of this program really benefit from the heart and soul of the program instructors. They teach from their heart so that the students can better their lives.

I personally know students that before attending this program were going nowhere with their lives and now those same students are either finishing high school, getting ready for college or have entered college. Without this program many of these students will most likely be out on the street selling drugs or committing other crimes.

If Governor Jodi Rell takes away funding for JUNTA, she will need to be prepared for all the problems that it will bring. In three to five years, maybe even less time, the teen pregnancy rate is going to go up, more children are going to be selling drugs than going to school, and there are going to be more gangs and more violence. Do you really want to leave these children with no other option? These programs are what helps children like us better ourselves and try to make our lives better. Please don't take this opportunity away from us and the thousands of other children that need a program like this to help them escape the problems they may have at home or at school.

I know you have tough budget decisions but Please help Junta. Junta helps today's children, like me, because we are the future!