



FEBRUARY 17, 2010

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE TESTIMONY
Public Hearing on the Governor's Budget Adjustments

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Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Jeannette DeJesus and I am president and CEO of the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford.

I appear before you today to express my grave concern about the governor's proposed 40 percent cut to the budgets of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the Connecticut Humanities Council.

On paper, these important organizations may appear to be easy targets at a time when even state agencies with less fancy names or lofty goals must economize in the face of our unprecedented budget crisis. Historic preservation and the humanities, you might think, laudable luxuries, but hardly matters of life and death.

For the Hispanic Health Council, however, the Trust for Historic Preservation has offered a lifeline to an agency that does change lives every day.

The Hispanic Health Council was formed 31 years ago after the death of a Puerto Rican baby in Hartford pointed up grievous gaps in the health care system for Latinos in Connecticut. Over the years, the council has conducted groundbreaking research and provided evidence-based services that continue to improve the health status of low-income Latinos. But we have a long way to go. Latinos now represent almost 12 percent of Connecticut's population, and as a group are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases and experience premature death than any other ethnic group in the state. These hard-working residents represent 40 percent of the state's uninsured, not because they don't have jobs, but because the jobs they have do not provide health insurance.

So what does this have to do with historic preservation?

The Hispanic Health Council purchased its four-story building at 175 Main Street in 1994. The building, which stands in a historic district at the gateway to Hartford's heavily Latino Park Street neighborhood, has become a symbol of the strength and resilience of our Latino residents. But by 2009, failing heating and air conditioning units, drafty windows, an inefficient electrical system and other age-related maintenance needs, began to make the building a drain, rather than an asset. The council has identified more than \$1

million worth of needed repairs just to keep the lights on and the building heated and cooled. With the agency facing a projected operating deficit for the first time in its history, we struggled to find a way to pay for the needed repairs.

That's where the Connecticut Trust stepped in. After touring our building, the trust awarded a grant to the Hispanic Health Council through the Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant Program which is funded jointly through the trust and the Humanities Council. That grant enabled us to apply to the City of Hartford for a larger Community Development Block Grant to begin the renovations. As I'm sure you are aware, the CDBG application process is so strict and complex that it would have been impossible for our small agency with no expertise in public construction projects to successfully navigate the process.

We are grateful to the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation for seeing the value of our building, not just for its historic significance, but as a community asset worthy of preservation. The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the Humanities Council are not just about buildings and paintings, they are about people and funding these organizations enriches all of our lives.

Thank you.