



# State of Connecticut

## Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

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### Testimony of Werner Oyanadel, Acting Executive Dir. of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission GAE Public Hearing ~ March 17, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 2B of the Legislative Office Bldg., Hartford, CT

Senator Gayle Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee (GAE), my name is Werner Oyanadel, Acting Executive Director of the Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here today to speak in opposition to S.B. No. 28 "An Act Consolidating State Agencies and Eliminating Certain Legislative Commissions" which attempts to implement the Governor's budget recommendations."

The LPRAC, for the record, was created in 1994 by an act of the Legislature. The Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) amended our mandate in 2003 and more recently in 2009. Under Public Act 09-07, this non-partisan and independent commission consists of 21 legislative appointed Latino advocates, academics, civic or cultural leaders from different geographic areas in Connecticut mandated to promote public policies that foster progress in the Latino communities found throughout our state.

Today I am here to urge you to take into consideration the vital role our agency plays in the halls of power representing those that have traditionally not had a voice in the political process. The LPRAC, along with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) have been vigorously trying to increase the participation of women, racial and ethnic groups on state boards and commissions. A topic that is well documented by the Office of the Secretary of the State on a report entitled *Diversity of Appointees on Connecticut State Boards & Commissions*, which in their 2009 report, indicated that representation of Latinos, Connecticut's largest ethnic group, essentially decreased from 3.2% in 2007 to just 2.8% in 2009. Now, if the CGA decided to endorse the Governor's recommendation that percentage would be lowered significantly – a course of action that would, in our opinion, be detrimental to the efficacy of what makes our representative democracy thrive.

Latinos in Connecticut comprise 12 percent of the state's population growing 12 times faster than the general population. Currently almost half of this population is under 25 years old and many of them are struggling to make ends meet as a result of the economic downturn affecting the U.S. economy. In Connecticut, for instance, 30 percent of Latino children under the age of 18 live in poverty – a percentage that is likely to increase considering that an additional 35,000 Connecticut children are expected to fall into poverty within the next few months. In response to this population shift and dismal economic conditions, the LPRAC has provided significant research and analysis for policymakers. Such as the LPRAC collaboration with the Center for Research and Public Policy, and more recently, with the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at UConn the LPRAC has studied the socioeconomic profile of Connecticut Latinos. With this information the LPRAC has endeavored to shape policy initiatives in areas such as education, healthcare, immigration and economic development. Furthermore, the LPRAC has hosted educational money literacy, housing, and HIV/Aids conferences across the state in partnership with policymakers, community agencies, and other key stakeholders from our community.

Unfortunately, there is tons of additional work ahead of us. The Latino community is in a state of crisis as evidenced by the significant health disparities, the largest educational achievement gap for Latinos and African-Americans, and hefty racial & ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system. It is for this reason that the LPRAC is looking to the GAE committee to reject S.B. No. 28 and allow the LPRAC to continue conducting our research on behalf of the CGA and continue being an influential voice within all branches of government.

In conclusion, we agree that Connecticut in the short-term must review the budget line-by-line to look for programs with proven records of success and reallocating or cutting programs that do not work or whose benefits are not equal to the investment. However, we also believe that our government has a moral obligation to strengthen state entities in order to create a more effective state government. This is particularly important during a recession where retaining jobs and creating jobs is imperative to help economic recovery.

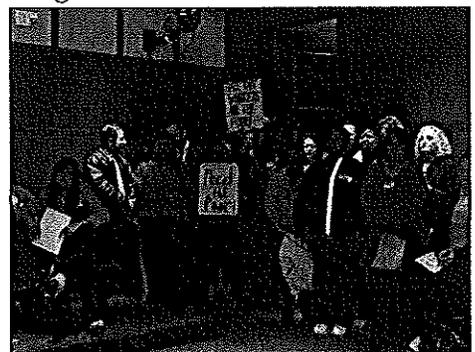
We hope that the committee agrees that we've contributed to the efforts towards reducing the budget gap\*. We also look forward to the committee recognizing that our efforts on behalf of Connecticut largest under represented population are worth of continued support such as the legislature did in creating us back in 1994.

\*: The LPRAC budget represents less than .001 percent of the overall budget and the LPRAC was already mandated by the CGA to reduce its budget by more than 53% just a few months ago after several months of arduous negotiations with an unprecedented deficit of \$8.5 billion.

### Summary of LPRAC Recent Activities

On July of 2008 the (LPRAC) hosted a housing summit at the Legislative Office Building (LOB) to discuss issues in the housing market that could help the Latino community. The Latino community has been impacted by the downturn in the housing market much earlier than the impact for the broader society. Speakers from as far away as Pennsylvania were present and participated in a national dialogue. Housing and other administrative leaders such as the Banking Commissioner, the CHFA Acquisitions Manager and the head of investments at the State Treasurer's Office were just some of the few housing-focused leaders present and speaking to the audience present that evening.

The LPRAC also co-hosted its first Latino Advocacy Day at the Capitol with the leadership of State Representative Andres Ayala, Jr. (D-128) on March 18, 2009 and the number of participants far exceeded our expectations. We were especially grateful to Senator Toni Harp (D-10), Rep. Juan Candelaria (D-95), Rep. Minnie Gonzalez (D-3), Rep. Jason Rojas (D-9), Rep. Kelvin Roldan (D-4), House Speaker Chris



Public attendance at the Latino Advocacy Day

Donovan and the Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams for their participation. We had a great many representatives from community agencies from throughout the state participate and due to the success of the event, we hope to host another one in the near future. The community came together to bring a message to the legislature and the capitol regarding the needs of the Latino community and how they see the negative impact of economic downturn much earlier than the broader community does. An appeal was made directly to the legislators to assist community non-profits in maintaining the funds received through state line-items in order for them to continue operating.

The LPRAC was also able to respond to requests from Connecticut legislators. For instance, State Representative Jason W. Bartlett (D-2) asked the LPRAC to speak in support of legislation that aimed at increasing the age students in the State of Connecticut are allowed to drop out of school with parental consent from the age of 16 to 17. This change was adopted during special session after similar legislation was approved in the House during the regular session earlier in the year but did not have a chance to be voted on in the Senate due to time constraints.

The LPRAC, at the invitation of the past Speaker of the House James A. Amann, participated as a member of the Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities legislative task force, which has successfully passed legislation through the CGA based on the panel's recommendations. The task force, which began to work last summer and concluded with a January report to the Legislature, focused on the nature of domestic violence in Connecticut immigrant communities and how state and federal laws discourage reporting of domestic violence crimes by both documented and undocumented immigrants.

The LPRAC also worked along side with members of the Appropriations Committee on their request to have the LPRAC submit Results Based Accountability (RBA) and outcome reports as developed by Mark Friedman. Mr. Friedman, for the record, is a speaker, consultant and author of the book "Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough: How to Produce Measurable Improvements for Customers and Communities" and has provided training and consultation on RBA in over 40 states and 7 countries around the world.



Education Leaders working on "RBA"

In May of 2009, the LPRAC provided a stipend of \$1,500 to a collaboration of researchers from the University of Connecticut to prepare a report on the condition of Latinos in the Eastern region. The book will be published shortly and the LPRAC is one of the organizations cited as forming part of the collaborators in finalizing the research and outcome. A celebration of the book was hosted at Brown University in Rhode Island on Friday, October 23, 2009 and we are currently coordinating a roundtable discussion on the topic, February 25, 2010.



Furthermore, the LPRAC has recognized several students from throughout Connecticut with more than \$50,000 in scholarships in total thanks to the generosity of private donations. Also, our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Tribute to Hispanic Veterans was held on May 29, 2009 with participation from the community from throughout the state including one of our own commissioners (Commissioner Enrique Marcano) as well as the son of one of our commissioners (Commissioner and current Chair Pablo Rivera). A total of 13 members of the community who are either active duty or retired Military received an appreciation certificate from the LPRAC, a proclamation from the Governor and citations from the Legislature, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz and State Comptroller Nancy Wyman.

The LPRAC also continued to work as committee members of the Racial & Ethnic Disparity Commission in the Criminal Justice System – A Commission which was created by the Connecticut state legislature in 2000 (Public Act 00-154) with the purpose of diminishing racial and ethnic disparity in the criminal justice system. The staff of the LPRAC helped coordinating the “Disparity in Connecticut: Where are we Now and Where are we Heading?” forum which was held at Central Connecticut State University on October 22, 2008. The event was well-attended with 650 participants. The Commission’s goal for the conference was to inform Connecticut’s decision-makers about the severity of the disparity problem, the ineffectiveness of mass incarceration and the importance of preventing our youth from entering the criminal justice system. The Commission was honored to have Professor Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., the Founder and Executive Director of Harvard University’s Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice as its Keynote speaker.