



*State of Connecticut*  
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*Affairs Commission*

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**Testimony**

**Appropriations Committee LPRAC Budget Presentation**  
**Tuesday, March 1st, 2011 ~ 3:00 pm to 3:30 pm**  
**Legislative Office Bldg., Room 2C ~ Hartford, Connecticut**

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Werner Oyanadel, Acting Executive Director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here with the Chairman of the LPRAC, Attorney Isaias T. Diaz, Esq., to discuss the Governor's budget recommendations for our agency for FY 2012 – FY 2013.

Our mission is to coordinate and provide access to resources to the Latino and Puerto Rican population in Connecticut by developing policies in areas of health, safety, educational success, economic self-sufficiency and discrimination. This is accomplished by submitting testimony, advising state leaders about the administration of state programs, gathering and maintaining current socio-economic information and conducting our work via Results Based Accountability (RBA) theory. The LPRAC also conducts educational and outreach activities intended to raise awareness of critical issues for the Latino and Puerto Rican population of the state among other tasks.

The LPRAC, as an organization, is more determined than ever to be an active partner with the Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor's Office as they prepare to balance the budget for the upcoming biennium. The LPRAC is fully aware of the epic challenges ahead of this committee – as you attempt to balance the budget and find innovative ways to recommend programs that will facilitate job growth and economic recovery within a budget deficit of 3.5 billion dollars.



As you know, the Governor recommended reducing our budget by \$48,512 in FY 2011-2012 and additional \$49,359 in FY 2012-2013. This potential reduction comes from our recommended budget for the upcoming biennium and it will impact our capacity to conduct a new in-depth Socio-Economic Status report that could have been used by policy-makers to introduce new legislation or to provide an in depth profile of this population that is needed to review the impact of both proposed spending and proposed revenue programs. Connecticut is a highly developed state, whose primary resources are the energies and skills of its citizens, yet Connecticut lawmakers must be aware of the social and economic costs resulting from demographic shifts and disparities in the education and skill training of its future workforce and therefore it needs to do a better job collecting and analyzing this data as it becomes available – this report would have been used for that purpose.

The LPRAC, for the record, experienced a 53% budgetary reduction in our current budget, but we have demonstrated that we can meet our statutory requirements with dignity, creativity and much dedication. While, the LPRAC is not going to oppose the recommended budgetary reductions proposed by the Governor, we are concerned that any additional cuts will begin to impede compliance with our statutory requirements and therefore, we respectfully request not making any additional cuts. In short, we are 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 in Connecticut.

**Statement by LPRAC Chairman Isaias T. Diaz, Esq.,**

Over the past few years, I have served as the Chairman of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission and I have the privilege to have served in this capacity shortly after the



Connecticut legislature reformed our mandate (i.e., Public Act 09-07) in October of 2009.

It is for this reason that I have worked side by side with the LPRAC staff and members of the board to learn precisely what our mission is and why it is so important that we refocus our energy performing our work via Results Based Accountability (RBA) – a disciplined way of thinking and taking action that is used in the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) to improve the quality of life in communities, cities, and counties. RBA is also used in Connecticut to improve performance of agencies such as ours.

We decided, therefore, to take a serious look at our internal bylaws and implemented the new changes pursuant to our mandate, which has served as a guide for everything we do in the legislature and across the State of Connecticut. The LPRAC, among other changes, created a new committee that works solely on RBA principles and thus far has identified (1) appropriate-level indicators; (2) conducted five “Turn the Curve” sessions in areas pertaining to the achievement of the desired results and (3) submitted our recommendations to the Appropriations Committee as mandated by Public Act 09-07.

The most recent RBA turn the curve sessions were held during the spring of 2010 in particular one on the issue of discrimination, one on public safety and another on self-sufficiency. Each session was attended by numerous state and community agencies including the Dept of Social Services, the New Haven Police Department, the Hartford Fire Department, the FBI-New Haven headquarters, the US Equal Employment & Opportunities Commission (EEOC) and Connecticut Human Rights & Opportunities Commission (CHRO). Community agencies such as the Spanish Speaking Center, Catholic Charities and the United Way also participated in the aforementioned sessions.



The strategies that we are using to improve progress on our identified indicators are already beginning to show progress. For instance, the LPRAC's RBA recommendations on education have been included in legislation passed through the CGA just a few months ago via Public Act 10-111 – An Act Concerning Education Reform in Connecticut and also within a report entitled Dropouts to Diplomas: Closing the Attainment Gap in Connecticut High Schools prepared by the Connecticut Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights. This last report received national attention for its recommendations and it was recently the focus of additional review within the legislative task force on closing the Achievement Gap Co-Chaired by State Senator Toni N. Harp and Miguel Cardona, which also introduced legislation this legislative session to eliminate the academic achievement gap between racial and ethnic minorities and white students. We are particularly proud that the legislation proposes to establish the Center for the Study of English Language Learning and Culturally Relevant Instruction and requires the state to develop a master plan to eliminate the achievement gap by 2020.

I would like to point out for this committee that Acting Executive Director Oyanadel, is the Co-Chairman of the Connecticut Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights and it was his advocacy and leadership within the committee that allowed for this entity to prioritize working on policy recommendations on closing the achievement gap. Moreover, the LPRAC through the work of its Priorities and Legislation Committee has recently held a legislative roundtable on education entitled “Challenges Facing Latino Students in Connecticut” in partnership with State Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr., President Pro-Tempore of the CGA, the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and the Institute for Puerto Rican and Latino Studies at the University of Connecticut.



This roundtable was near and dear to LPRAC because many of our students in the Latino community are behind in standardized tests, not attending school, dropping out, or not going on to college – either because they can't afford it, are not allowed to due to their low academic achievements, or denied access due to their immigration status. Our goal was to have a healthy discussion without playing “pin the tail on the donkey” by placing blame on any specific sector but rather to find solutions and make recommendations to the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) that will jumpstart the dramatic gains that our growing population of Latino students needs to achieve – without delay – so that they may compete and lead in Connecticut's economic recovery.

I would also like to highlight for this committee the fact that LPRAC passionately believes in the importance of providing recognition to its youth for their academic accomplishments and therefore partners with several philanthropic organizations, the business sector and non profit organizations to increase our scholarship program for the youth. We are proud to say that in total we have already awarded \$105,000.00 in scholarships and recently received a new commitment for \$50,000 from Verizon Wireless to strengthen our scholarship program for the next five years.

Furthermore, the LPRAC provided funding from a Bank of America grant to the “Mi Casa” agency in Hartford to provide money literacy training to youth attending their agency programs during the summer. Mi Casa was able to prepare a 5 week training session in at least 5 financial topic areas in conjunction with a staff member from Bank of America where a total of 50 youth were trained in how to manage a checking and savings account, how an ATM works, why it is important to establish and maintain good credit and how to participate in on-line financial services. The youth began the program with little or no financial



knowledge. After participating for the 5 weeks, however, their financial literacy increased to 90%. In addition, the older youth took the younger participants under their wing and taught them the use of the ATM and other financial tasks.

In May of 2010, the LPRAC created a partnership with a community agency in Windham and the Windham Public Schools to host a HIV-AIDS presentation to help students identify at-risk behavior and to inform them that everyone is at risk of getting HIV from blood-to-blood contact, sharing needles or unsafe sex.

Finally, but equally important, is the fact that the LPRAC convened a very successful information campaign regarding Puerto Rico's new birth certificate law. Agency staff was able to generate over \$30,000 in funding from our new partners from State Farm, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and ASPIRA of Connecticut. The objective of the campaign was to inform people born in Puerto Rico residing in Connecticut about the importance of applying for a new birth certificate. The law regarding Puerto Rican birth certificates changed on July 1, 2010 and called for all Puerto Ricans to obtain a new-fraud proof certificate in an effort to protect Puerto Rican citizens' identity from identity theft. Our efforts to inform the public were able to absorb and avoid precious government resources being depleted through the inundation of phone calls and inquiries to other government and elected officials offices and staff.

In sum, LPRAC has taken a "standard setting" approach to achieving its requirements pursuant to the terms of the new mandate and was able to implement and exceed expectations in spite of past cuts to our staff and budget. We feel that in a short amount of time, we have altered the perception of this commission, both internally at the LOB, and state-wide, thanks to the efforts of our staff and commissioners and have worked diligently to raise monies from the private sector to offset cuts to



our budget and to perform our required duties under the new mandate. We therefore, graciously request the opportunity to continue our work by not being eliminated as a commission. Our staff, commissioners and I promise that we will continue to build upon our recent successes and aid the Legislature in whatever manner necessary. Thank you for your time and consideration.