March 4, 2011

Statement to the Appropriations Committee by Ariel Martinez; Executive Director - New Life Corporation

Sen. Harp, Rep. Walker and members of the committee:

My name is Ariel Martinez and I'm Executive Director of New Life Corporation a faith-based non-profit located in New Haven Connecticut. The purpose of New Life Corporation is to build the financial economic security of low-income individuals/families in the Greater New Haven region through services in financial education and asset-building.

While we understand the tough economic times we all face and the tremendously difficult challenge your committee has in working with Governor Malloy on dealing with the state's budget gap, I submit this statement in opposition of the Governor's proposed elimination of all funding to the Hispanic Human Resource Development (HHRD) program line-item. This decision not only looks to balance the budget on the 'backs of low-income and poor resident' it additionally does it by eliminating all funding to service a specific ethnic group of people (Hispanics).

This is of grave concern to organizations like New Life because while we provide services for all groups of people, almost 60% of our clients are Hispanic residents. Over 90% are low-income while others have no income and are searching for jobs. Over the past seven years we have provided services to over **12,000** people and through our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program have assisted them in accessing over **$26.7** million dollars in Federal/State income tax refunds and Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC).

We are also the only Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Certified Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) Acceptance Agent within 80 miles from New Haven. We assist undocumented low-income workers in processing and obtaining their ITIN number which permits them to legally file their income tax returns to the IRS. Within this program, over 99% of our clients are Hispanic.

One would think that we are a large organization, but in truth we have only four staff. The reason we are able to service such a large number of people is through organizational collaborations and the hard work of volunteers which we recruit, train, certify and manage on a yearly bases. Over the past seven years, we've worked with more than 520 volunteers in carrying out our mission in the service of these poorest of families.

That said, the proposed elimination of funding to our organizations would cut a large hole in the Governors **'safety net'** priority as Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group of people in the state of Connecticut. Current the total line-item budget for Hispanic serving agencies is less than an abysmal 1% while the Hispanic population in the state is over 12%. Imposing any kind of cuts, much less the elimination of funding would be and irresponsible representation of spending priorities we cannot explain to our clients much less tell them where to go for service. This action will result in a state-wide decrease of vitally needed services to the neediest of families and in some cases the total elimination of some of these Hispanic servicing agencies who are uniquely qualified to assist this population and are additionally strategically located in communities where many larger organizations are unable to reach them.

It is for this reason that I respectfully ask that you oppose the elimination and/or any cuts to the HHRD line-item currently being proposed. I want to thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion and your willingness to have serious deliberation on this topic.

Respectfully Submitted:
Ariel Martinez; Executive Director

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