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Testimony of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission in support of the Governor's Bill 6390, "An Act Concerning Access to Post Secondary Education" ~ Tuesday, March 15, 2011 11:00 A.M.
Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT

"It is essential in today's society to provide opportunities for people to work hard in order to continue the process of maintaining diligent work ethic."

--Isaias T. Diaz, Chairman of the LPRAC

Good morning madam Co-Chairs Bye, Willis and members of the Higher Education Committee. My name is Werner Oyanadel, Acting Executive Director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. I am here today to speak in support of the Governor's Bill 6390, "*An Act Concerning Access to Post Secondary Education.*"

The legislation before your committee today provides in-state tuition status to certain students that have attended a Connecticut high school for at least four years, graduated from high school and have been accepted at a higher education institution in our state. Students also would be required to file an affidavit with their school stating that they are seeking legal status or will in the future if they become eligible. Please keep in mind that these requirements for immigrant students are much stricter than the residency requirements for out-of-state students to gain in-state tuition. The intent of this program is to help children who were brought up here by their parents as infants without immigration

papers, grown up in our state and already received an education in Connecticut to have equal access to higher education.

Ten states have already enacted similar legislation to allow long-term immigrant students to become eligible for in-state tuition if they meet certain requirements as listed herewith such as California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin.

For the record, any child, regardless of immigration status has a right to attend public schools – both primary and secondary education – under a 1982 Supreme Court decision called *Plyler v. Doe*. The justices, according to Thomas A. Saenz, President of the Mexican and Legal Education Fund (MALDEF) “*[R]ecognized that we as a nation would depend on the contributions of these students regardless of their status toward our future economy.*” This proposal before you today is an extension of that reasoning as Mr. Saenz so eloquently stated and “*therefore a reflection of the strong national constitutional values of equal protection that are embedded [in Plyler v. Doe].*”

You may ask yourself, how much will this bill impact the state budget? This proposal may have a positive impact to our budget considering that many of these students, who are able to get in higher education, do not attend college because they cannot afford



the out-of-state tuition, which can be three times the cost per year more than in-state tuition. The increase in enrollment at community colleges is a potential revenue gain and considering that community colleges do not have a cap on enrollment they will not be replacing out-of state students.

I must tell you that I am delighted that this bill is having a public hearing on such an important issue of equity and fairness. A pluralistic rich and vibrant democracy depends of an informed and engaged citizenry. Democracy in Connecticut is very much alive as evidenced by the turnout here today. These students are currently being accepted to college on their own merits, this bill would not change that; these students are not asking for “free tuition”; this bill would not change that; these students are not asking for financial aid, and this bill would certainly not change that. All they are asking for equal access to higher education so that they may continue to contribute to our society and our economy.