State of Connecticut
Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

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Testimony of
Isaias T. Diaz, Esq., LPRAC Chairman
Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission
On Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program Allocation Plan
Appropriations, Human Services and Energy & Technology Committees
September 27, 2011

Good afternoon everyone my name is Isaias T. Diaz, Chairman of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC) I am here today to speak about the proposed allocation plan for the 2012 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Block Grant.

The proposed plan is based upon assumed FY 12 available funding which is 59.8 percent less than total funding available to the Department of Social Services in FY 11 ($115.5 million). As proposed, the program, according to data collected by the Office of Fiscal Analysis, will support benefits to an estimated 36,826 households. In FY 11, 117,876 households were deemed eligible for assistance, or 81,050 more than projected under the plan's terms. In other words under the proposal before you many low-income households would lose winter heating assistance which can literally mean the difference between life and death for many of our state residents.

As you may already know the Connecticut Latino community was hit extremely hard by the Great Recession. Latinos are less likely to be employed and more likely to be living in poverty than they were before the recession which affected our state back in December of 2007. As a matter of fact the unemployment rate in Connecticut is hovering at 9 percent but the unemployment rate averaged 17.7 percent among Latinos in our state – which is the third-highest unemployment rate in the nation within a total population that totals almost half a million people or roughly 13.4 percent of the overall population – a population which increased by almost 50 percent in the last decade while in comparison the white population actually decreased by point three percent.

It is within this context that we urge the members of this committee to ensure last year's levels of energy assistance will be available this winter. We are convinced that now more than ever our elected officials in Connecticut will find a way to propose an alternative plan that will be able to respond to this energy assistance crisis in an effective and responsible manner. The alternative of inaction in the midst of an economic downturn is unconceivable.

LPRAC is a nonpartisan policy agency within the Legislative branch of government created in 1994 by an Act of the Connecticut Legislature. Under Public Act 09-07, the LPRAC consists of 21 appointed volunteers who are mandated to advise the General Assembly and the Governor on policies that foster progress in the Puerto Rican and Latino communities residing in Connecticut.