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Testimony of Isaias T. Diaz, Chairman of the
Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission
Regarding S.B. No. 24 “An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness”
Tuesday, February 21, 2012 at 1:15 PM in Room 1E
at the LOB, Hartford, Connecticut

Good morning Senator Stillman, State Representative Fleischmann and honorable members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA), my name is Isaias T. Diaz, Chairman of the Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here today to speak in support of S.B. No. 24 “An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness,” limited to the specific areas of the bill discussed by this committee here today such as: (1) teachers, including certification, tenure, performance evaluations, subjects for collective bargaining, teachers' retirement, recruitment grants, and professional development, and (2) miscellaneous topics, including vocational-technical school governance structure and early childhood education.

LPRAC, for the record is particularly interested in legislative discussions that enhance families' access to high-quality early childhood educational opportunities, legislation that aims at closing the achievement gap and improves the low graduation rates for Latino English language learners and other minority students. We, at LPRAC, also support programs that prepare all youth for college success and job skill development for the trades of the 21st century, promote meaningful collaborations between schools and communities (parents, organizations, churches, colleges, and other needed sectors), broaden and strengthen the curriculum for all students, and support dual language education. Furthermore, it is imperative that school administrators and policymakers realize and take seriously the impact of under resourced communities and schools, and institutional racism on the quality of education, specifically but not exclusively, in our Connecticut urban public schools that serve high numbers of Latino, African American, and poor students. As a result we support S.B. No 24, which aims to implement the Governor's six key principles for education reform which will help the state narrow the achievement gap and restore Connecticut as a model for academic excellence for all students.¹

The Governor's proposal as listed in S.B. No. 24 calls for increasing the number of low-income children served by the system as a prelude to future expansion and

¹ Key principles for Education Reform as recommended by the Governor of the State of Connecticut: (1)Enhancing families' access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities (2) Authorizes the intensive interventions and enables the supports necessary to turn around Connecticut's lowest-performing schools and districts; (3) Expands the availability of high-quality school models, including traditional schools, magnets, charters, and others; (4) Unleashes innovation by removing red tape and other barriers to success, especially in high-performing schools and districts; (5) Ensures that our schools are home to the very best teachers and principals – working within a fair system that values skill and effectiveness over seniority and tenure; & (6) Delivers more resources, targeted to districts with the greatest need – provided that they embrace key reforms that position our students for success.

reform of early childhood education, and as an investment in the lives of Connecticut's pre-k children, the Governor is proposing to provide 500 high-need children with opportunities to attend existing early childhood education programs around the state. The LPRAC supports these efforts as listed herewith; however, in order for Connecticut to ensure that all our children have equal access to Early Childhood Education it must not delay in making more significant investments for early childhood care and education. The budget currently includes \$4 million in new funding for this endeavor.

S.B. 24 also offers a comprehensive plan to recruit, attract, and develop top talent within our public schools. The proposals build off the guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation that were developed by the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council and approved by the State Board of Education on February 10, 2012. These guidelines establish the parameters for annual principal and teacher evaluations, and require 45% of the evaluations to be based on student achievement outcomes. The guidelines also establish four performance ratings: Ineffective or Below Standard, Developing, Proficient and Exemplary. The proposals in S.B. 24 connect this evaluation framework to every aspect of the system, from recruitment to preparation, certification, professional development, recognition, tenure, and dismissal. The LPRAC is supportive of these recommendations as listed herewith. The Governor's recommendations create high expectations for educator preparation; frees districts to offer individualized; and meaningful professional development for our most accomplished educators. Research, according to data released by ConnCan shows that great teachers and principals literally change their students' lives, and that just one ineffective teacher can have a lasting negative impact on students. Therefore, we urge the Education committee to approve this recommendation as listed in S.B. 24.

The Governor's plan also makes significant changes to the Connecticut Technical High School System by introducing a new system of governance designed to strengthen linkages between schools and leading employers and includes additional trade funding in order to support hands-on training opportunities for students – \$500,000 to increase the amount of trade supplies to \$1.33 per student, per day – an increase of 55 cents. The LPRAC agrees with these changes; however, LPRAC respectfully recommends that the bill should seek to increase funding to cover additional evening and weekend Adult Education classes at all of our state technical high schools to counter act striking low graduation rates for English Language learners.

The LPRAC applauds the leadership of the Education Committee and the Governor of Connecticut for making 2012 the year for education reform in Connecticut and we look forward to submitting additional recommendations in the next few days in areas relating to English Language Learners, Charter Schools and low performing schools.

The LPRAC, for the record, was created by an act of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) in 1994 to make recommendations to the members of the Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor for new or enhanced policies that will foster progress in achieving educational success, economic self-sufficiency, end discrimination, improve public safety and achieve health equity in Connecticut.