Testimony of Americo Santiago in opposition to merging the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission into the New Commission on Citizen Advocacy - HB 6354 "Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning General Government." - Friday, March 22, 2013 at 10:00 A.M. in Room 2C of the LOB in Hartford, CT.

Honorable Senators and Representatives of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Americo Santiago. I am here today to oppose the language within H.B. 6354 "Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning General Government," which would consolidate the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC), the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Children, the African-American Affairs Commission, the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission, and eliminate the Commission on Aging into a new agency within the legislative branch to be called the Commission on Citizen Advocacy as a way of reducing the current state budget deficit..

The Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission was established by Public Act 94-152 of the Connecticut General Assembly back in 1994. The agency is on its way to celebrating 20 years of existence next year. The savings realized with this merger is so miniscule that it would probably cost far more in employee time to re-organize them all under one stand-alone commission than it is to allow them to continue to provide:

- Public policy guidance on behalf of the populations they serve-in this case, the Hispanic community of Connecticut which has almost doubled since the 2000 census was taken;
- Access to research that can help draft legislation;
- Access to experts in the respective fields the legislature may be looking at to helm major state departments or judicial appointments;
- Continue to bring-in added revenues through access to private sector grant funding;
- Creatively come up with means of increasing the state's revenue streams as it is currently doing by having the legislature consider allowing immigrants to obtain driver's licenses and registration-raising a potential additional $3 million for state coffers;
- Helping to reduce the educational gap by raising (thus far since 2005) over $140,000 in grant dollars towards scholarships for Hispanic youth to obtain higher education;
- Serve as an informational resource for the legislature on the socio-economic condition of the Latino community.
- Teach those who wanted to learn about money literacy how best to budget, invest, track and maintain their finances;
- Assist in identifying discrimination in the workplace where one major company in Hartford was served with a class action lawsuit for discriminating against at least 22 Hispanic employees by firing them for speaking Spanish on the job;
- Establishing a public information campaign to inform the Puerto Rican community about a change in legislation in Puerto Rico that invalidated all Puerto Rican birth certificates for anyone born on the Island;
- Studying and recognizing that we needed to be at the table in the two times that the state has considered redistricting electoral boundaries state-wide;
- Helping to bring the US Department of Justice to Connecticut when Hispanic business owners in East Haven were being harassed by its Police Department; &
- Helping pass legislation on issues such as In-State Tuition for Latino Immigrant Students and more recently helping amend the Alvin W. Penn Anti-Racial Profiling Law.

I urge, therefore, the Appropriations Committee to continue to support the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission as a stand-alone agency as it works to inform you as you do your work at the Legislature on behalf of this great State of Connecticut.

Thank you and I am now ready to answer any questions you may have regarding this matter.