

Annette Deonarine

Testimony

Good morning Senator Harp, State Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, I am here today to discuss the Governor's budget recommendations for FY 2014 – FY 2015. I oppose Section 11 of HB 6350 "An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium ending June 30 2015 and other provisions relating to revenue."

My name is Annette Deonarine and I am the Director of Multicultural Affairs at Advocacy Unlimited, Inc., AU is a statewide nonprofit organization in Connecticut that helps countless persons with, or in recovery from, mental health or co-occurring disorders and their families in many ways. Our mission is to improve the quality of their lives. We achieve this by providing comprehensive education and training in recovery and advocacy skills for persons in recovery and helping them find employment, reintegrate into the community, and get their lives back. Graduates of the Advocacy Education Course become part of a grassroots network of trained advocates that help others in their recovery, especially by advocating for their rights and teaching them to advocate for themselves.

During the past 10 years, AU has invited LPRAC to our classrooms in order to provide parts of our Legislative training. The Legislative training is completely taught in Spanish. LPRAC has been involved in the translations and upkeep of maintaining the curriculum current and relevant. The students are primarily from Puerto Rico, and other Central and South American countries. With that being said, the complexity of the training is no easy task. Making the training culturally competent as well as clear and presented in a way that is logical, at times even having to present the differences of the process in other countries and how they are different than ours in order to show its relevancy as compared to. The AU students learn about the legislative process and develop the skills to prepare and deliver testimony. They learn about voting rights, and laws that affect them.

During non-session times when the students aren't able to view this 'live' the Legislative session is brought to them by way of a "mock" session. The students learn about the process held right here in this building. The presentations have all been held by LPRAC's acting Executive Director Werner Oyanadel. He teaches the legislative process and shares a wealth of information unimaginable to many of us (example), Mr. Oyanadel provides our students with current and updated information that directly affects their community. Continually engaging them not only in the legislative process but the socio economic issues in their community, which include sharing the commissions reports on the status of Latinos in our state and understanding how the community, their children's education and how their lives may be impacted.

In closing, I hope that the Appropriations Committee rejects the Governor's proposal under section 11 of HB 6350. It is in the best interest of our community and the people we serve.