



**State of Connecticut**  
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**Affairs Commission**

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Testimony of the Latino and Puerto Affairs Commission in support of  
Raised Bill 6384 “An Act Concerning English Language Learners.”  
& in support of Bill 6359 “An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System.”  
Friday, February 15, 2013 at 11:00 a.m. in Room 1E of the LOB in Hartford, CT

Good morning Co-Chairs of the Education Committee, State Senator Stillman, State Representative Fleischmann and all the members of the Education Committee. My name is Roberto C. Fernandez, a Commissioner of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here today to speak on behalf of LPRAC in support of Raised Bill Number **6384** “An Act Concerning English Language Learners,” which, if adopted by the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA), would help ensure that English language learners students are not inappropriately identified as requiring special education due to reading deficiencies.

Research suggests that a child’s race and ethnicity significantly influence the probability that he or she will be misidentified as needing special education and that fact disproportionately can have immediate and long term negative effects to English language learners. We, at LPRAC, continue to hear from stories around Connecticut of students erroneously labeled as disabled when in reality they are just in need of support with their language acquisition and other early intervention programs and support services that give these students the personalized attention they need to succeed.

The change that we, at LPRAC, suggest is small or technical in nature. However, we believe that the change suggested by HB 6384 will have a significant impact in the Latino community. As many of you know, the State Department of Education shall conduct a study on this subject in the near future, which will require the creation of plans and strategies that will have to be implemented and used by local or regional boards of education that demonstrate improvement in the reduction of the misidentification of minority students requiring special education under current law. Therefore, we urge the members of the Education Committee to support HB 6384 to help ensure that all students that are English Language Learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds receive the appropriate support they need to succeed.

LPRAC is also supportive of the Governor’s Bill Number **6359** which establishes the Office of Early Childhood – a new agency that intends to build on work done in 2012 when the Connecticut General Assembly invested \$9.8 million in early childhood initiatives to both help close the achievement gap and most importantly to help prepare all children to be self-sufficient. In short, this new office aims at providing integrated support services that children need to achieve the basic skills for success.

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.