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Testimony from

Migdalia Castro, Commissioner
Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

Appropriations Committee, March 5, 2015
Hartford, CT

Good Evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee – my name is Migdalia Castro and I am a Commissioner for the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. I am honored come before in support all the Legislative Commissions and to speak on behalf of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission's budget.

First and foremost, I am happy to see that the Governor has recognized the importance of the work that the Commission does on behalf of a constituency that continues to increase in our state. The Hispanic community has grown by over 50 percent in the last 10 years and the average age of our population is 28. This is where CT's workforce is concentrated and why the LPRAC's work is so vital in empowering this critical population.

I have been able, as a former Alderman in the City of New Haven, to work with the immigrant community and know that their needs are ever-increasing. The LPRAC has made some headway in such things as:

- Working with the US Department of Justice to ensure that discriminatory practices used against the Hispanic community in one community in the southern part of the state ceased.
- I also worked in conjunction with our staff and my colleagues to ensure that we as an agency assisted in getting DREAMERS to realize their dream of a college education by having a chance to pay in-state tuition.
- Finally, we also worked collaboratively with legislators to ensure that immigrants in the state could obtain 'drive only' licenses in the state so that they can get to and from work and school. This effort created a new revenue stream for the state and was realized thanks to the hard work of State Representative Juan Candelaria and the Black and Latino Caucus.

In addition to working to support immigrant rights, the agency has also focused on Hispanic small businesses participation in the State's contracting process. We worked collaboratively with Rep González and former Commissioner Lourdes Montalvo in securing standardized testing for Barbers who come here from Puerto Rico so that they can readily pass the state test to be licensed. As a result, they now test solely for a barber's license and not for any cosmetology licensing as was the standard at the Department of Public Health prior to our involvement with this important initiative.

We also took the lead when Puerto Rico's law regarding birth certificates changed and thousands of Puerto Rican US residents needed to be informed as to the new process for obtaining a newly formatted birth certificate to protect their identities. We as an office secured the necessary funding from corporation and foundation funders such as State Farm and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to embark on an educational campaign via the print and broadcast media.

The work of the Commission is only getting more complex as we try to reduce and eliminate many of the barriers that still exist for our community. Matters such as access to affordable housing in communities where more jobs would be readily available as well as access to a quality education for Hispanic children are key areas where staff will research potential legislative action to move that possibility forward. This is necessary because the State has, thru its Section 8 and other housing programs, isolated access to affordable housing for the Hispanic community to certain areas in violation of federal housing laws.

Finally, we will work in collaboration with other stakeholders, the staff and as a Board to design a strategic plan of action in our priority areas of education, health, housing and small businesses for the ensuing two years. We hope that the Appropriations Committee reconsiders the \$40,000 potential reduction that the agency is staring down in the next biennium because it will not allow us to enhance our work thru the needed research that will inform the next steps to success for our vibrant and ever-growing community.

Thank you for the time you have afforded me this evening and I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony.