



State of Connecticut
Latino and Puerto Rican
Affairs Commission

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Testimony from

Richard A. Cruz, Chairman
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 Richard A. Cruz and I am the Chairman of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. I am here today to speak in support of all the Legislative Commissions and, particularly, on behalf of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission's budget.

We are grateful to Governor Malloy for having kept the Commission's budget at current levels. We, however, wish to point out that if we take into consideration the two recent rescissions we experienced, cuts that we have received during the great recession which total 53% and combine those with the potential biennium cutbacks which total more than \$40,000, not to mention additional potential exposure, the agency's viability will be negatively impacted. We used to have a staff of 6 people and are now down to 4. And while all of us at LPRAC remain committed to effectively responding to our mandate we have already begun to limit use of our limited resources in a number of important areas that unfortunately cannot be performed due to the reductions faced thus far. This research will be impacted should the cutbacks the Governor is proposing over the next biennium stand.

We are aware that the Committee is facing major cutbacks, however, we also recognize the growing needs of our population in a number of highly specialized areas that require more not less attention from our lawmakers in the halls of power; such as bilingual education, help for ELL and issues of racial profiling which affected Latinos in East Haven and finally and the severe segregation impacting our housing stock in the state. It is in this context that we commend our state elected officials for being good stewards of our budgetary resources and we look forward to finding innovative ways of trimming the budget without cutting back on the services for the most vulnerable populations. For instance, the state's ECS formula would allow the capture of at least \$21 million in revenues which are currently over-funding some of our municipalities. LPRAC staff has the details as to where this is occurring and we would be happy to share that information with the committee.

LPRAC's work informs the Legislature and Governor of the needs of one of its steadily growing populations here in the State-the Hispanic population. While the LPRAC has been around for the past 20 years, the work towards empowering the Hispanic community has been going on since 1972 when the first Hispanic legislators such as Maria Sánchez, Juan Figueroa and Edna Negrón won seats in separate election years to the House of Representatives.

- We have supported recent legislation to assist the community in obtaining drivers only licenses for undocumented Hispanic residents.
- We were at the forefront of a complaint filed against the East Haven Police Department for profiling the Hispanic community in their town and working

- with the Federal Department of Justice to ensure that the incidents were investigated and changes occurred within the Department to benefit the community overall.
- We have assisted the DREAMERS in realizing their goal of attaining higher education.
- We have hosted turn the curve sessions to identify barriers to Hispanic small businesses obtaining state contracts.
- We are working to find a legislative solution to the lack of affordable housing in areas that would open access to better employment opportunities for our community and for a more fair access to quality schools and a better education for Hispanic children as a result.
- We have also identified, through our RBA work that the ELL formula as it is currently implemented within CT school systems, is ineffective for children trying to learn the English language without enough time to test with a successful grade. The LPRAC is working jointly with legislative and community partners to pass a law that would allow for more time for them to garner proficiency in the language prior to testing their subject knowledge.

These are but a few of the many issues that the LPRAC is working to correct on behalf of our constituents here in the State-the Hispanic community. If the LPRAC sustains further cuts that it would negatively affect the outcomes of this important work on behalf of this growing, vibrant and young community. Connecticut's Hispanic population is one of the youngest with an average of 28 and its future workforce. Our work will assist the State in ensuring that this vital community remains here and becomes the workforce for the many corporate and mid-size companies the state is home to.