

Public Hearing of the Appropriations Committee – March 5, 2015

Testimony in support of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission from Bill Powers, PO Box 12, Windham, CT. 06280

Over the past few years I have come to greatly appreciate the efforts of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission for providing opportunities to discuss problems, needs, issues and concerns of the Latino population of Connecticut. The Commission solicits information from those affected and provides recommendations for appropriate legislative action.

As a certified teacher and Licensed Professional Counselor, LPRAC has given me an opportunity to both speak out publicly and to participate in different forums about correcting injustices faced by my Latino and special education students. In May 2013 LPRAC held its Regular Commission Meeting in Willimantic gathering information from our local community. It provided me with an opportunity to voice my concerns about the lack of needed educational and mental health resources for my students. In January of 2014, LPRAC sponsored a Public Hearing in Hartford. I was able to publicly discuss the failure to provide equal or even basic educational opportunities in Connecticut for ELL students. I was deeply appreciative of the opportunity to speak to the Commission about the urgent need to improve education for English Language Learners (ELLs) based on my classroom experience. The concluding remarks from my statement were, “ The law is on the side of our students. Ethics is on the side of our students. Clearly, it is not going well for our students. Your Commission needs to exert its influence on the Governor and Legislature so that they are aware of the injustices to our students on a daily basis” .

In January of 2015, LPRAC sponsored a Public Forum, held in Hartford, on ELL/Bilingual Education. A panel consisting of legislators, educators and business leaders explored the latest in research regarding learning for ELLs. They discussed ways to apply this research to Connecticut’s Latino students. My participation in this forum allowed me to see that the negative educational experiences of Latino students were not confined to Windham but were apparent throughout Connecticut.

My comments today are focused upon LPRAC’s role in improving the quality of education for Latino students in Connecticut, for this topic is near and dear to me. This is not to minimize the many other important functions the Commission serves. They serve to improve the lot of most rapidly growing segment of our population for the benefit of everyone.

Thank you for this opportunity to support a Commission making significant contributions to Connecticut.