



State of Connecticut
Latino and Puerto Rican
Affairs Commission

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Testimony of Werner Oyanadel before the Appropriations Committee regarding
Against H.B. No. 6824 An Act concerning the state budget for
the biennium ending June Thirtieth 2017, and making appropriations
therefor and other provisions related to revenue.

Friday, February 27, 2013

5:00 P.M. LOB Room 2C – Hartford, CT

Good evening Senator Beth Bye, Representative Toni Walker and all the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Werner Oyanadel, Executive Director of the Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here to speak about the importance of restoring the Department of Social Services rescissions to the Hispanic Human Resources Development (HHD) and Healthy Start budgetary line items – which are currently targeted for elimination in the Governor's Budget proposal for the next biennium.

All of us at LPRAC fully understand that tough and painful decisions have to be made to balance our state budget for the next biennium; however, we strongly believe that we cannot do so without dismantling essential services earmarked at improving the workforce viability of low-income residents that have been carefully crafted by the Connecticut legislature as a recognition that the growing Latino population face significant language and cultural barriers that Latino non-profits can effectively overcome at a significantly lower cost to taxpayers. Most importantly, reducing services for some of our most vulnerable neighbors during this economic recovery is bad public policy, hurting Connecticut's long term growth and stability while – again – resulting in more costs to taxpayers.

Demographics reveal that the Latino population in Connecticut is young and dramatically growing in size. Unfortunately, data also reveals that this population has too many low-income households and workers with high rates of unemployment, as well as too many teenagers who unfortunately drop out of high school – not to mention the highest achievement gaps in education in the nation. Other troubling statistics show that many Latino families live in racially segregated and socially isolated areas throughout the state where they are not afforded the opportunities to succeed. Nevertheless, there is now a once in a generation opportunity for Latinos in Connecticut to enter the middle-class and improve their socio-economic standing in large numbers as the state's Baby Boom workforce is aging rapidly and entering into retirement.

Connecticut – at this crossroad – must enhance long-term investments with surgical precision – despite seasonal deficits – in successful innovative community-based programs that provide so many with the opportunities to meet their individual potentials and become active, productive and vital members of our communities. I

am also very concerned that the elimination of this line item will bring many qualified staff of these non-profits to the unemployment line – when in reality we should strive – more than anything we do – to maintain this educated and qualified health and human services workforce by continuously improving their opportunities available to those who chose to serve our most vulnerable residents in our state – not the opposite as recommended by the Governor’s budget.

This proposed budget also eliminates critically-important programs like Healthy Start, the only statewide maternal health program that provides over 5,000 low-income women and children essential health services that ensure a healthy pregnancy and early childhood. This is important to LPRAC and should matter to you as well. Teenage births have declined among all racial/ethnic groups in Connecticut except among Latino females. CT Latino females were 20% of the population of females under age 18. However, they account for 66% of births to teenage mothers this year. Teen pregnancy and childbirth cost U.S. taxpayers \$9.4 billion and is a significant contributor to higher high school dropout rates among teen mothers. There are various causes for the higher rate of teenage births among Latino females – relative to whites and African Americans – some of which include racial and economic isolation that create barriers to positive youth outcomes and reinforce perceptions that there are few life choices available to teenage Latinas living in poverty. However, we must not look at this particular program to generate short-term savings but rather based on the dramatic increase – lawmakers should be prepared to provide more consistent year-to-year funding for evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs and maternal health resources to turn the curve on this area – an area that is without a doubt a crucial investment.

Again, the commission understands the need to control state expenditures and balance the budget with extraordinary large deficits. But we also recognize the growing Latino and senior population requires more, not less, attention to issues that include services aimed at improving the workforce viability of low-income residents. We, at LPRAC, reiterate the importance of restoring the Hispanic Human Development line item, and request fair funding to these vital non-profits.

Connecticut’s Latino nonprofit community based providers serve as an extraordinary effective and efficient network of organizations and people that successfully provide critically important health and human services in many of our most needed urban settings and should be supported and expanded – not eliminated.

LPRAC is a nonpartisan policy agency within the legislative branch of government created in 1994 by an act of the Connecticut Legislature (i.e., P.A. 94-152, amended by P.A. 03-229 and amended by P.A. 09-07). Under Public Act 09-07, LPRAC consists of 21 appointed community leaders that are mandated to advise the Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor on policies that foster progress in the Latino communities residing in Connecticut.