

Good afternoon Senator Bye and Representative Walker and all honorable members of the committee. My name is Fernando Betancourt and I am the Executive Director of the San Juan Center Inc. a non profit community based organization providing social services since 1971 in the Greater Hartford Area. I will like to provide testimony in opposition to certain provisions of HB 6824. Specifically, the radical proposed cuts and the elimination of various programs under the State Department of Social Services. The elimination of the Human Resource Development- Hispanic Programs goes against the principles and the objectives that define the Department of Social Services. Principles such as "utilize holistic, evidence-based, and **culturally appropriate services** (our emphasis) as a platform for improving quality of life". "To reduce barriers to employment and strengthen financial stability and self -sufficiency" to name only two of those goals.

For the last thirty years, a network of non profit organizations have been doing just that! Our contracts with DSS and other state agencies have been the tool to formalize our relation as partners working toward the same goals. In the process we have collectively saved millions of dollars to the state, provided valuable services by leveraging our own resources while serving the most vulnerable population. You do not treat your most loyal and effective partner by cancelling those contracts and all funding to our agencies.

We have sacrificed more than any other sector in the last decade. We have not received cost of living adjustments and in fact, we have sustained cuts year after year. We have the responsibility to remind policy makers, that these changes violate the bipartisan consensus sanctioned by this institution that nurtures and maintains our safety net. I implore the General Assembly to look carefully into this unfair proposed outcome and to inject some fairness and equity by engaging us in this important conversation. The communities we serve demand no less. Thank you for your consideration. I am available to answer any questions from the committee.