



# State of Connecticut

## Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

18-20 Trinity Street  
Hartford, CT 06106  
Tel. (860) 240-8330  
Fax (860) 240-0315  
lprac@cga.ct.gov  
www.cga.ct.gov/lprac

### Chairman

Richard A. Cruz

### Vice-Chair

Yolanda Castillo

### Secretary

Emanuela Palmares

### Treasurer

Elena Trueworthy, M.S.

### Parliamentarian:

George Hernández

### Commissioners:

Ramón L. Arroyo

Migdalia Castro

Jay Gonzalez

Dr. Ruby O'Neill

Dr. Agnes Quiñones

Ruben Rodríguez

Dr. Eugene M. Salorio

Pablo Soto

Christian Soto

Feny Taylor

Danny Torres

### Executive Director

Werner Oyanadel

### Special Projects Director

Lucia Goicoechea-Hernández

### Associate Commission Analyst

Orlando Rodríguez

### Administrative Assistant

Clarisa Cardone

## Testimony Supporting HB 5465 and HB 5470

Orlando J. Rodriguez

Associate Commission Analyst, Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

Education Committee, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, Hartford, CT

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez and I am an Associate Commission Analyst with the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). LPRAC supports both **HB 5465: AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DUAL LANGUAGE MAGNET SCHOOL AND A STEM MAGNET SCHOOL** and **HB 5470: AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL INTERESTED IN PURSUING A COLLEGE DEGREE IN EDUCATION.**<sup>1</sup>

### Regarding HB 5465

For English Language Learners (ELLs), Connecticut has had the worst education outcomes in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math among the fifty states for several years. At the same time, the population of ELLs in Connecticut has grown to nearly 35,000 (Spanish is most common foreign language.) and accounted for nearly 7 percent of the K-12 population in the 2014-2015 school year.

The **Compañeros** program is a highly regarded English-Spanish dual-language immersion program in Windham. In this K-8 dual-language program, students are taught in both languages in various subjects throughout the school year. This provides English-dominant students the opportunity to become fluent in Spanish as well as teaching English to Spanish-dominant students. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, ELLs in dual-language programs in Connecticut are outperforming their peers in other ELL programs by 50 points on the overall LAS Links Scale Scores.

LPRAC recommends expanding the existing Compañeros program to an inter-district magnet school via HB 5465. We ask that two administrative issues be considered to ensure the long-term success of a new **Compañeros Magnet School**.

\* As this will be a regional school, it may be more appropriate for it to be administered by the EASTCONN Regional Education Service Center (RESC), which already runs several regional schools in eastern Connecticut. As a truly regionally administered school, families from the many towns throughout the region may be more likely to send their children to a new Compañeros Magnet School. If administered by the Windham School District, the school will be

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the sources of information used in this testimony can be found in LPRAC's 2016 Legislative Policy Agenda at, [https://www.cga.ct.gov/lprac/docs/2016/LPRAC\\_2016Agenda\\_Web\\_08Jan2016.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/lprac/docs/2016/LPRAC_2016Agenda_Web_08Jan2016.pdf)

accountable to only the Windham Board of Education. Parents who do not live in Windham may view this as undesirable and may therefore decide not to send their children to this school thereby impeding its mission as a regional school.

\* Consider making the new Compañeros Magnet School a teacher-led school, which have been successful across the country. This has the potential to increase the number of teachers willing to live and work in rural eastern Connecticut and thereby make it easier to fill the many bilingual education positions that a dual-language school requires.

“[[The Math and Science Leadership Academy](#)] offers a challenging, supported curriculum in a low-income Latino community where previous shortages are now ended because **teachers are lining up trying to get hired to come into this school.**”<sup>2</sup> Denver Public School System

There are more than 90 teacher-led schools with varying levels of autonomy across 15 states with 7 in Massachusetts, 5 in New York, and 1 in Connecticut at the [High School in the Community: Academy for Law and Justice](#), in New Haven.<sup>3,4</sup> Teacher-led schools may be the solution to getting more teachers to fill positions in Connecticut’s subject shortage areas and priority school districts. A new Compañeros Magnet School in rural eastern Connecticut would be an excellent opportunity to determine the level of teacher autonomy needed as a **non-monetary incentive** for teachers to seek employment in geographic areas they otherwise would not consider.

#### Regarding HB 5470

Connecticut’s K-12 population is becoming more racially diverse, but there is a severe and ongoing shortage of minority teachers who reflect the demographics of the changing student population. Many of the shortage areas are in urban towns with a large enrollment of Hispanic students.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the demographics of the state’s workforce is changing as the Baby Boom generation, which is predominately white and older, enters into retirement and are replaced by a workforce that is increasingly Latino. In fact, the state’s working-age population is forecast to be over 20 percent Latino by 2030. Regrettably, Connecticut has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest unemployment rate for Hispanics among the fifty states.

If enacted and adequately funded, HB 5470 will create high school programs that allow minority students to take teacher preparation courses with the goal of both increasing the number of minority teachers in our urban schools and reducing unemployment among Latinos. In addition, HB 5470 should create and adequately fund a parallel program that enables high school seniors to earn certification and work experience to be **employed as para educators when they graduate high school**. This will provide an alternative route to classroom teaching for students whose financial situation requires them to work and save for college before they are financially able to begin and finish a four-year college degree.

LPRAC is grateful to this committee for its ongoing focus on the needs of Latinos throughout Connecticut. Our board has made it clear that improving K-12 education outcomes is a top priority for Latinos in Connecticut. In particular, LPRAC and its board thank Rep. Susan Johnson for her ongoing work to improve the lives of Latinos in Willimantic.

---

<sup>2</sup> Colorado: Where Everyone is a Learner, Teacher, and Leader, National Education Association, <http://www.nea.org/home/37113.htm>  
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.teacherpowered.org/about>

<sup>4</sup> High School in the Community Academy for Law and Justice, <http://www.highschoolinthecommunity.org/about/>

<sup>5</sup> 2015-16 Subject Shortage Area or Priority School District Reemployment, <http://www.ct.gov/trb/cwp/view.asp?Q=276124&A=1598>