

Testimony Regarding H.B. 5044, An Act Making Adjustments to
State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017 &
Funding for the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC)

Attorney Isaias Diaz, former member of LPRAC & Past LPRAC Chairman

Committee on Appropriations

Friday, February 19, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Isaias T. Diaz, former Chairman of the Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here to speak in opposition to the budget recommendations offered by the Governor regarding the LPRAC agency budget.

LPRAC, for the record, is a nonpartisan policy agency within the Legislative branch of government created in 1994 by an Act of the Connecticut Legislature. Under Public Act 09-07, the LPRAC consists of 21 appointed volunteers who are mandated to advise the General Assembly and the Governor on policies that foster progress in the Puerto Rican and Latino communities residing in Connecticut.

LPRAC has a stellar record in a number of fronts – one of the areas that I am very proud of LPRAC’s legislative work is in the area of business & economic growth. For instance, to encourage economic self-sufficiency, legislators – with the support of LPRAC – expanded the state contract set-aside for Minority Business Enterprises (MBE) by approximately \$35 million. Public Works contracts awarded by municipal and quasi-state agencies are now included in the MBE set-aside, which results in 175 more local, regional, and state government entities looking for minority contractors – an area which without a doubt will spur business growth and create rich opportunities for entrepreneurship and progress in our communities.

LPRAC also successfully helped the State redirect an additional \$11 million dollars in state funding for K-12 education for cities and towns with the largest Latino populations, and a pilot program aimed at providing education and job readiness services to both children and their parents in several of our urban communities. Also related to education, new laws that LPRAC has recommended passage aim to reduce the disproportionately high rate of in-school juvenile arrests among Hispanic youth, reduce chronic absenteeism in K-12 in the state’s largest population communities, and make charter schools more accountable and transparent in their operations.

LPRAC’s budget was cut by a substantial 32.5 percent during the Great Recession, and subsequent rescissions reduced it further. LPRAC absorbed those considerable cutbacks and still fulfilled its mandated mission. Funding levels have yet to be restored, but services have been sustained by prioritizing resources and economizing diligently.

It is within this context that I urge you to oppose the LPRAC’s budget as recommended by the Governor of Connecticut for FY17. This proposal would cut LPRAC’s already disproportionately reduced budget by an additional \$46,453 – reductions that in total would almost end the operating funds of this Legislative Commission.

Adverse impacts cannot be prevented indefinitely with continued deterioration of financial resources, and the continued viability of LPRAC as an effective link between Connecticut’s Latino residents and policymakers across state government could be jeopardized. At a minimum, key initiatives may be cancelled or postponed – such as the anticipated Latino socio-economic study or career focused STEM program - constraining the value and impact of LPRAC’s work on behalf of Connecticut’s Latino communities, and presence in those communities.