



**Testimony on House Joint Resolution 161 (HJR 161): Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting.**

**Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly's Government Administration and Elections Committee**

**Submitted by Ingrid Alvarez, Connecticut State Director, Hispanic Federation**

**March 13, 2019**

Co-Chairs Fox, Flexer, Vice-Chairs Haskell, Winkler, Ranking Members Sampson, France and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Ingrid Alvarez and I am the Connecticut State Director of the Hispanic Federation (HF). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and present the views of the Hispanic Federation's 15 Latino nonprofit member agencies across Connecticut in full support of *House Joint Resolution 161 (HJR 161): Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting*.

Over the past two decades, Connecticut has undergone a transformational demographic shift making every community and geographic region in our state more diverse. Our organization's nonpartisan civic engagement work reflects this diversity in the holistic and grassroots approach we execute to engage individuals and diverse communities. Hispanic Federation's community investments and capacity building play an active role in protecting and ensuring the voting rights of all of our state's diverse registered voters and specifically, we are committed to helping minimize very real systemic and structural barriers that create negative experiences and hardship for Connecticut's Rising American Electorate's (RAE) to exercise their right to vote. Connecticut's RAE is comprised of Latinos, people of color, new voter registrants, mid- to low income households, women, single mothers and low to mid propensity voters that are historically underrepresented, face unique barriers to vote and become disenfranchised.

To highlight a few of the voter access systemic barriers Connecticut RAE's face:

1. Latinos and other Limited English Proficient (LEP) eligible voters in the state face shortages of trained bilingual poll workers to assist them at the polls.
2. Connecticut holds no specific law requiring employers to give an individual time off from work to vote in Election Day. This greatly impacts the ability of low-moderate income working voters, especially individuals that work scheduled shifts or hourly wage earners that stand to lose paid time, to participate in elections.
3. RAE voters in large urban centers like Hartford and Bridgeport experience longer lines and wait times in comparison to other cities/towns and higher incidents of ballot shortages, machine malfunctions or other election systems irregularities that threaten a voter's ability to cast a ballot.

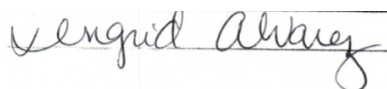
4. Connecticut's RAE also experience higher rates of being carless and face limited access to affordable and reliable transportation to meet their critical daily needs like going to work, school and getting to a designated polling site.

Yet, there is robust evidence on the positive impact on voter satisfaction and increased voter turnout outcomes from the 39 states and the District of Columbia that presently offer its citizens some form of early voting. The research shows improved polling sites and workers performance; reduced stress on the voting system on Election Day; experiencing increased voter satisfaction rates in the 39 states and the District of Columbia. In the 2018 mid-term elections, 40 million voters cast their ballots in some manner other than appearing at their polling place on Election Day.

To share our own experience in Connecticut's 2018 midterm election; Hispanic Federation joined a statewide coalition of other people of color led and serving nonprofit organizations targeting the state's RAE in all of the eight counties (Fairfield, Hartford, New Haven, Litchfield, New London, Tolland, Middlesex, Windham Counties) in the state. We launched a Get Out the Vote nonpartisan campaign in August 2018 and ran straight through the closing of the polls on election night and mobilized more than 320,000 registered voters to the polls. This is a most unprecedented outcome and a historic number for us in Connecticut. There is no doubt in our minds that had Connecticut offered early voting as an option for that our collective GOTV output could have significantly increased.

It validates that we must invest and diversify opportunities to include all communities to engage in our democracy. When we do so, they do so all are empowered to exercise their most fundamental American right; making our state stronger for it. Connecticut has always served as a national leader in election modernization. In fact, the implementation of online voter registration and same day-Election Day Voter Registration resulted in the highest voter turnout in our state's history in the past election cycles. The implementation of early voting is a logical critical next step in our election systems innovation process to sustain the increased voter-turn out and engagement rates we've achieved to date. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Ingrid Alvarez

Connecticut State Director



## **Hispanic Federation**

*The mission of Hispanic Federation is to empower and advance the Hispanic community. Hispanic Federation provides grants and services to a broad network of Latino non-profit agencies serving the most vulnerable members of the Hispanic community and advocates nationally with respect to the vital issues of education, health, immigration, economic empowerment, civic engagement and the environment.*

Hispanic Federation is the premier Latino membership organization in the nation founded to address the many social, racial and economic inequities confronting Latinos and the nonprofits that serve them through providing grants, administering human services and coordinated advocacy for our broad network of agencies that serve more than 2 million Latinos nationally in key priority areas such as health, education, economic empowerment, immigration and civic engagement.

In Connecticut, HF represents fifteen Latino-led grassroots organizations that are the mainstay of community life: early childhood education and care centers, afterschool programs, immigration and legal service providers, housing, emergency shelter, community health and workforce development providers in our fastest growing and most diverse communities (Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, New London, New Britain, Meriden, Wallingford, Danbury, Norwalk). Through the collective strength of our members, Hispanic Federation informs and educates policymakers on issues that are important to Connecticut's more than **540,000** Latinos.

### **Hispanic Federation Connecticut Member Agencies:**

#### **ARTE, Inc. (New Haven, CT)**

Contact: David Greco, Executive Director [dsgreco@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dsgreco@sbcglobal.net) (203) 469- 4536

Arte, Inc., is dedicated to promoting Latino art, culture and talent. Arte establishes partnerships with community agencies and groups to improve the quality of life of residents. Arte assists Latino artists; organize programs, events, shows and exhibits. Arte develops and runs effective youth programming to engage children and mold better citizens.

#### **Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders (BCYL), (Bridgeport, CT)**

Contact: John Torres, Executive Director [jtorres@bcyl.org](mailto:jtorres@bcyl.org) (203) 913-0073

The mission of BCYL is to provide youth with diverse sports, educational and community awareness programs that foster physical, intellectual and social development, while instilling pride and helping them build character and self-esteem, so that they can reach their full potential and value their role in society.

#### **Chemical Abuse Services Agency Inc. (CASA) (Bridgeport and New Haven, CT)**

Contact: Asher Delerme, Executive Director [adelerme@casaincct.org](mailto:adelerme@casaincct.org) (203) 331-4728

The mission of CASA, Inc. is to provide holistic and culturally competent community-based behavioral health services to individuals, families and communities seeking recovery from addictions, co-occurring disorders and related behavioral health issues. CASA was established as a response to the need for available and accessible behavioral health treatment (substance abuse and mental health treatment) services to populations, which have been traditionally underserved.

### **Center for Latino Progress (Hartford, CT)**

Contact: Yanil Teron, Executive Director [yanil\\_teron@ctprf.org](mailto:yanil_teron@ctprf.org) (860) 247-3227

Center for Latino Progress' mission is to advance the social and economic conditions of the community at large, with emphasis on Hispanics, through education, training, supportive services, leadership development and advocacy.

### **Connecticut Students for a Dream, (State-wide)**

Contact: Lucas Codognolla, Executive Director [Lucas@ct4adream.org](mailto:Lucas@ct4adream.org) (203) 391-1626

C4D's work is focused in creating social change and addressing the root causes of injustice and inequity in the lives of our members and communities.

### **Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury, Inc., (Danbury, CT)**

Contact: Francisco Zapata, Chief Operating Officer [alex@danburycentro.com](mailto:alex@danburycentro.com) (203) 798-2855

Mission is to serve, educate and advocate for Latino and other ethnic communities by facilitating community planning, mobility programs and creating community opportunities that foster social and cultural interaction; eliminating language barriers, creating citizenship and civic participation opportunities, providing health and well-being.

### **Hispanic Health Alliance (New London)**

Contact: Alejandro Melendez-Cooper, Executive Director [info@hispanicalliance.net](mailto:info@hispanicalliance.net) (860)-941-9421

The Hispanic Alliance mission is to advance Hispanic contributions to the Southeastern Connecticut community. The organization works to achieve an active, involved, progressive and generous Hispanic community; playing a substantial role in the advancement of our region; contributing the gifts of our heritage; and exploring new ways to enhance communication and collaboration with the community at-large.

### **Hispanic Health Council (Hartford, CT)**

Contact: Jose Ortiz, President & CEO [joseo@hispanichealth.com](mailto:joseo@hispanichealth.com) (860) 527-0856

Hispanic Health Council is an organization based in Hartford, CT whose mission is to improve the health and social well-being of Latinos and other diverse communities via community-based research, evidence based direct services, training and policy advocacy.

### **Junta for Progressive Action, (New Haven, CT)**

Taking Hispanic causes to heart

Contact: Daniel Reyes, I Executive Director [daniel.reyes@juntainc.org](mailto:daniel.reyes@juntainc.org) (203) 787-0191

Mission is to provide services, programs and advocacy that improve the social, political and economic conditions of the Latino community in greater New Haven while nurturing and promoting its cultural traditions as it builds bridges with other communities.

### **Latino Community Services, Inc., (Hartford, CT)**

Contact: Madeline Rodriguez, Executive Director [mrodriguez@lcs-ct.org](mailto:mrodriguez@lcs-ct.org) (860) 296-6400

Mission is to reduce the further spread of HIV/AIDS among the Latino Community and other populations at risk and improve the quality of life and health outcomes of individuals affected by HIV/AIDS.

### **San Juan Center, (Hartford, CT)**

Contact: Fernando Betancourt, Executive Director [fernandob@sanjuancenter.org](mailto:fernandob@sanjuancenter.org) (860) 522-2205

San Juan Center is an individual and family Social Services organization in Hartford, CT providing counseling services to families, housing to low-income elderly and youth development activities.

### **South Norwalk Community Center, (Norwalk, CT)**

Contact: Katherine Villanueva, Chief Operations Officer [COO@sonocenter.org](mailto:COO@sonocenter.org) (203) 899-2485

South Norwalk Community Center (SONOCC) meets the educational counseling, vocational, employment, emotional, cultural and recreational needs of economically dis-advantaged people and minority groups so that they become self-sufficient. The center carries its mission by offering a number of services inclusive of but not limited to, licensed summer camp program, Youth tutoring; health, nutrition and counseling services; senior center programs, job development services, and adult education.

### **Spanish American Merchants Association, (Hartford, CT)**

Contact: Julio Mendoza, Executive Director [julio\\_mendoza@samact.org](mailto:julio_mendoza@samact.org) (860) 278-5825

SAMA is a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Connecticut to serve as a vehicle for the economic growth of business. SAMA was created to assist business people, in particular, Latinos, to acquire a better understating of economic principles.

### **Spanish Community Center of Wallingford, (Wallingford, CT)**

Contact: Adriana Rodriguez, Interim Executive Director [arodriguez@scowinc.org](mailto:arodriguez@scowinc.org) (203) 294-2256

Spanish Community Center of Wallingford (SCOW) is a social service organization committed to responding to the needs of the Latino Community by assisting them to succeed in U.S. society, and to enable Latinos to maintain and share their rich varied cultures with the broader community through social service guidance, educational opportunities and cultural sharing.