



**State of Connecticut**  
**Latino and Puerto Rican**  
**Affairs Commission**

18-20 Trinity Street  
Hartford, CT 06106  
Tel. (860) 240-8330  
Fax (860) 240-0315  
E-Mail: [lprac@cga.ct.gov](mailto:lprac@cga.ct.gov)  
Web Site: [www.cga.ct.gov/lprac](http://www.cga.ct.gov/lprac)

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**NOTES**  
**LPRAC Regular Commission Meeting**  
**February 19, 2014**  
**Centro de La Comunidad**  
**New London, CT**  
**5:30 p.m.**

Commissioners Present:	Honorable Migdalia Castro, Richard A. Cruz, Ana González, Emanuela Palmares Leaf, Dr. Eugene Salorio, Pablo Soto and Elena Trueworthy, M.S.
Commissioners Absent:	Rosa Acosta, Ramón L. Arroyo, Francisco R. Borres, Yolanda Castillo, Isaías T. Díaz, Esq., Roberto Fernández, Jay González, Lourdes Montalvo, Dr. Agnes Quiñones and Danny Torres
Staff:	Werner Oyanadel, Executive Director and Clarisa Cardone, Sr. Legislative Secretary – Alexander Walters, LPRAC Intern

**Tape 1 A**

**Chairman Cruz** asked **Board Secretary Commissioner Palmares-Leaf** to do roll call. Quorum was not established.

**Public Participation:**

1. LPRAC welcomed several speakers to our agency's commission meeting in the City of New London and for over 2 ½ hours listen to their concerns and issues that they wanted our agency to know about. The speakers included Elizabeth Garcia Gonzalez, Executive Director of the Centro de la Comunidad of New London, Congressman Joe Courtney, Mayor Daryl Justin Finizio, State Representative Elissa Wright, Elena Figueroa, Aracelis Vázquez-Haye, City Councilman Efrain Dominguez, Jr., and Marina Pérez Taverner. The following notes includes a summary of their statements to our agency.
2. **Elizabeth Garcia Gonzalez**, Executive Director of the Centro de la Comunidad de New London welcomed LPRAC to El Centro de La Comunidad.
3. **Congressman Joe Courtney** – 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional Districts also commended the commission for traveling to the City of New London. He commented about the significant growth of the Latino population in Connecticut particularly within the New London County. He also commented about the diversity within his own staff and delineated some good new programs such as the affordable Care Act, Earned Income Credit Tax and other student loan relief that in his opinion have a great potential to help all families in our state including a high proportion of families in the Latino community;
4. **Mayor Daryl Justin Finizio** – City of New London spoke passionately about the progress made nationally with regards to increasing access to quality healthcare and discuss the need to keep the pressure with our congressional delegation in support of passing comprehensive immigration reform. He thanked LPRAC for traveling to the City of New London. He spoke about the need to diversity boards and commissions and to make sure LPRAC prioritize ways to increase voter turnout. He informed LPRAC that he appointed Efrain Dominguez, Jr. who is the first Latino to serve on a Charter Board of Commission in city history and is seated next to Aracelis Vázquez-Hay who is an elected member of their Board of Education and also Liz García González is an elected member of their Board of Education.

**Tape 1 B**

5. **State Representative Elissa Wright** – Serving the 41<sup>st</sup> Assembly District – Groton and New London for over a year. She spoke about the global financial crisis and the recession that affected Connecticut and difficulties that legislators had in Hartford to make improvements in our economy. She also spoke about new legislative opportunities discussed at the Connecticut General Assembly during the 2014 legislative session including Universal Pre-K, education, and housing; She also discussed some labor related bills that included recommendations to increase the minimum wage.

6. **Efrain Dominguez, Jr.** – Council President Pro Tempore & Chair, Public Welfare welcomed LPRAC. He has been in New London for 33 years. He was very animated and passionate about describing the diversity of cultures in his community and spoke about the need for LPRAC to advocate in support of quality education for all children particularly at an early age. He is supportive of public policies that enhance services for English Language Learners (ELL) and mentioned to LPRAC that he teaches at a dual language middle school for six years and it's a wonderful program.
7. **Elena Figueroa** asked LPRAC to support an agreement – moving currently through the legislative process – reached between the State of Connecticut and CSEA/SEIU LOCAL 2001 that provides for professional development and the first general wage increases in 12 years for family child care providers under Connecticut Care 4 Kids program.

**Tape 2 A**

**Commissioner Palmares Leaf** said that as a new mom of a toddler, she cannot tell her how important it is the work that she is doing. Quality childcare is literally what is going to cure the future of the Latino Community. Our children are suffering because it is hard to find childcare when a Latina who is offering this kind of service, that's giving your child so much love, is fulfilling all the other parts of the curriculum that a center may not, is only getting \$89.00 a week. How do you expect that quality at the point to inspire to get her associates, to get more of the educational, academic into her service? This is an investment in the future of our community.

**Commissioner Trueworthy** wanted to highlight the work that gone on here and the importance of the work that Helen and CSEA/SEIU has is going to accomplish and we know this is going to be successful it has to be. They have basically given attention to a large population that are educating our Latino children, that have been forgotten about, that has been ignored, that have been never paid attention to. If you think about all the Latina small business owners, they are caring for multiple young Latino children so it's multiplying. If we talk about the achievement gap, if we talk about the third grade reading scores, it all starts way before that. It's not just about money but they need to earn minimum wage, it is going to go back in the economy, it is going to help with economic development.

**Chairman Cruz** informed Mrs. Figueroa that LPRAC could not make decisions tonight about her request due to the lack of quorum but LPRAC will meet shortly in a special meeting to discuss her request alongside other pressing legislative issues within the next few days.

8. **Ramona [No last name provided]** – Spoke in support of the services provided at “El Centro de la Comunidad”. She knows a lot of families that come here for help y “apoyo” - support. She told the Commission that she has only been eight months in the United States from Colombia and she takes English classes here. She thanked el Centro de la Comunidad for all of their help.
9. **Marina Pérez Taverner** Me llamo Marina Pérez Taverner y les agradezco esta oportunidad para abogar por nuestros niños latinos en CT y, específicamente, en New Britain. I have been a bilingual educator for over 35 years in CT in several priority school districts: New Britain; Hartford; New Haven; Norwalk; Bridgeport; and, currently, in New London. My certifications include elementary education, Spanish 7-12, TESOL K-12, bilingual education K-12, and administration and supervision. I have proudly served the Latino families and children of this state as Spanish and bilingual classroom teacher at all grade levels, bilingual resource teacher, bilingual early childhood literacy coach, bilingual curriculum developer, K-12 district supervisor of a Bilingual/ESOL department, and principal of two bilingual schools. I participated in the development of the initial dual language programs in New Haven where two schools continue to flourish, one being intra-district and the other inter-district. I developed, implemented and supervised the Mano-a-Mano Dual Language Program in Norwalk which is also still operating. The trilingual Multicultural Magnet School in Bridgeport was awarded the 2007 U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon under my supervision. In addition, I was named Administrator of the Year after two years as the proud principal of the DiLoreto PK-8 Dual Language Magnet School in New Britain. After the abrupt closing of our dual language program, I retired and was contracted to work as a dual language instructional coach and specialist at the Adelante Dual Language Program at Jennings School in New London. New London's strategic operating plan includes the implementation of a K-12 Dual Language Pathway, extending the K-5 dual language program to the secondary level. I am proud to participate in that worthy project. New Britain had a long history of advocacy for Latinos and bilingual education since the CT bilingual law was first mandated. For the past 40 years, bilingual education in New Britain was overseen by competent and knowledgeable educators in the field of second language acquisition and bilingual education who advocated relentlessly for our ELLs at the local and state levels. Our ELLs came (and are still arriving) from Latin America, Poland, Asia and the Middle East. Bilingual education programs offered a culturally responsive and research-based education to our youngsters and families. As the research on effective instructional programming for English Language Learners grew over time, bilingual educational programming in New Britain and around the country evolved with that research knowledge base as a foundation. Transitional Bilingual Education programs in New Britain isolated our latino children for 30 months in segregated bilingual classrooms. The 30 month CT law, based on political whim rather on empirical evidence, led to the placement of ELLs into mostly culturally unresponsive mainstream classrooms with little academic support. New Britain, as in other poor districts, did not hire enough ESL teachers to support the growing population of ELLs requiring LTSS services. The first dual language program in New Britain opened about 20 years ago. It successfully grew with parent and central office advocacy alongside smaller, isolated and less than successful TBE programs throughout the district. I need to remind you that the Bilingual Education law provides in writing for the

option of offering dual language bilingual education programming to all students, both native English speakers and ELLs, as a viable and effective educational program, based on research. Severe budget cuts, lack of satisfaction with our TBE programming, and the popularity of the dual language program contributed to New Britain's board of education decision to merge all TBE students into our DiLoreto PK-8 dual language magnet school. I was delighted to take in our Latino ELL children who were not thriving in our other schools and their parents were satisfied to finally participate in the successful dual language school that so many had applied to, but with limited space available. DiLoreto School had made safe harbor, families were applying in great numbers, eighth grade students passed entrance exams into intermediate and high levels of Spanish and mainstream academic courses, and NBHS teachers reported that our students outperformed all others in district in their ability to think critically, communicate, and behave as the international ambassadors that we had taught them to be. Over the years, several former dual language students were named the valedictorian and salutatorian for their graduating class! In addition, our school data ranked amongst the highest in attendance rate and the lowest suspension rate in the district. Parent survey results increased to over 85% satisfaction rates with very high % of return. So, what led to the abrupt dismantling of DiLoreto School's dual language program? There were a myriad of factors operating that could answer this question. The factors that I consider to be most critical to this detrimental decision are: The board of education's irresponsible decision to hire a new superintendent based on an unachievable promise to increase the achievement of English Language Learners within three years. In reality, all that could be promised was increased ENGLISH proficiency, NOT increased academic achievement for our Latino ELLs at DiLoreto or elsewhere. The student achievement data published by the superintendent's former district demonstrated an increase in English proficiency and a DECREASE in academic achievement. The Structured English Immersion (SEI) program that was brought here, is a culturally unresponsive method based on English grammar, which segregates students, and did not produce increased academic achievement. The SEI program was dismantled in that district. The board of education hired what amounts to be an empty promise to our community. This brings me to the second critical factor in the abrupt dissolution of the dual language program at DiLoreto and the bilingual education programming in New Britain – NO ADVOCACY from the Latino community. Nothing but silence. No educated caucus of Latinos and community members spoke out to advocate for bilingual education, parental empowerment and involvement in the educational planning for their children, or educational equity as mandated by federal law. Thirdly, a lack of oversight by the state department of education contributed to the overnight abolition of bilingual education and our dual language program. The superintendent reported to the parents and public that the state department gave him full approval for his plan to replace BE with the SEI method.

RECOMMENDATION: Strengthen the current Bilingual Education law by:

- Removing the 30 month limitation
- Stipulating allowable research-based effective bilingual programming, such as dual language education
- Increasing the number of state department consultants to oversee research-based bilingual programming throughout the state
- Requiring local boards of education to implement bilingual program governing councils, with SDE oversight i.e. SDE training to boards of education and parents of bilingual program students; SDE attendance to bilingual program governing council meetings and monthly reports sent to the SDE commissioner, Latino Caucus, etc.
- Insofar as ALLIANCE monies are concerned, the law should stipulate that any and all money that is allocated to a school or school district for turnaround purposes shall be awarded AFTER a thorough review of the turnaround plan. That review should be conducted by a committee comprised of a majority of experts in the field of study relevant to the turnaround plan and that all educational programming is based in research and evidence. In addition, the turnaround committee will consist of members' representative of all stakeholders in that plan, and not appointed by the board of education. I highly recommend that you look into the enormous amount of money that the state gave DiLoreto School to implement a turnaround program that is not empirically based and, in fact, can be detrimental to ELLs. It is a shameful waste of taxpayers' dollars and a poorly devised and implemented plan from beginning to end by the commissioner's Alliance office.
- The SDE, caucus members and legislators should look beyond our state borders to see what is happening in Massachusetts and New York. I am a member of the tristate consortium of dual language educators in MABE (Massachusetts Association of Bilingual Education) and am very enthused by our progress. But CT is sadly underrepresented in this endeavor.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The situation in New Britain is unacceptable, unconscionable, unlawful, and is a regrettable regression to the overt repression of and racism towards our Puerto Rican American citizens and Latino immigrants who arrive in pursuit of the American multicultural dream. What they actually get are purposeful tactics to disengage them in the educational decision-making process and rhetoric about what is good for their children from an assimilationist point of view. The decision makers who hold the power and purse strings in New Britain call themselves educators and advocates for URBAN VOICES. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

**Commissioner Palmares Leaf** asked what can we do for you as a Commission.

**Marina Pérez Taverner** asked what are you doing with the Latino community in New Britain, what have you done to meet with the Latino Coalition, what are you doing for the people in New Britain that a Latino Caucus in New Britain did not do.

**Commissioner Trueworthy** said that everything she said is very true as to what happened and how it occurred in the sense that if it was a good talk from those at a certain level and it just flew right through without any barriers stopping it. I think because of the lack of vigilance, it was done before anybody really understood what happened exactly.

**Marina Pérez Taverner** said she was fired and was fired 10 days before her retirement date so that the Superintendent and the Board of Ed could let everybody know in New Britain that you do not challenge the Superintendent of Schools in New Britain. She was asked to leave at 12:00 p.m. on the day before Thanksgiving, 10 days before her retirement date.

**Commissioner Ana González** said that the Legislative Leaders who were present at the public hearing on bilingual education testified very highly of the program in your school, they mentioned your program as a premier example in dual language.

**Marina Pérez Taverner** said that it was beautiful and they had 97% attendance, kids came in dancing, they loved being in school, they had happy teachers, happy parents. Their student CMP scores were not good but so weren't the other 5 schools.

**Commissioner Palmares Leaf** asked LPRAC staff if we as a Commission can go soon to New Britain.

**Mr. Oyanadel** replied that the next meeting in the community will be in the City of Meriden but LPRAC may consider meeting in New Britain immediately after.

**Commissioner Palmares Leaf** suggested that in New Business they can talk about a meeting of the Commission in New Britain on this very important issue.

**Chairman Cruz** announced that LPRAC is going to try to convene a special meeting so that we can discuss some of these items and take a vote before the end of the session.

10. **Jairo** spoke to LPRAC about issues pertinent to small businesses owners. He specifically discussed the difficulties he experienced as a business man in New London.

#### **Tape 2 B**

11. **Aracelis Vázquez-Haye** thanked everyone for traveling to the City of New London and said that she was a recipient of LPRAC's Youth Promesa Award several years ago. She really encourages the next generation of Latino youth that there are opportunities that may not be visible in the City of New London but there are ways to connect and build bridges across the state. She is also an Educator and a Minister and serves on the board of Education in the City of New London and is a Chaplain at Connecticut College and her work experience is in Higher Education. She asked LPRAC to focus on new initiatives that aim at helping more young Latino men succeed – The President of the United States mentioned it in the state of the union address.

**Chairman Cruz** reminded everyone that we need to convene a special meeting and that he will be contacting each LPRAC Commissioner to coordinate the date of the special meeting.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by,

Emanuela Palmares Leaf  
Secretary  
LPRAC Board

EPL:cjc