

**TESTIMONY
SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING**

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Respectfully Submitted to
Chairman Wayne Bryant

Testimony given by:
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Thank you Chairman Bryant for this opportunity to review with you and the New Jersey Senate Budget Committee the proposed funding for services to the Hispanic population. My testimony today will outline the growing concerns of Hispanic agencies throughout the State regarding the flat funding of services in the context of population growth and demand for services. My name is Elsa Candelario. I am the Executive Director of the Hispanic Family Center in Camden, NJ and Chairperson of the Hispanic Directors' Association of New Jersey (H.D.A.).

Hispanic agencies throughout the State have grave concerns about their ability to continue to meet the ever growing demands of the communities that they serve. Flat funding for several years, even 10 or more in many cases, is tantamount to a decrease in funding. This is further aggravated by population growth, expanding need for services, as well as an increased cost of doing business. I am compelled to report to you that these facts combine to threaten the ability of those who operate human service agencies within the Latino community to continue vital programs and services.

Over 5,000 of Camden's most vulnerable citizens come to Hispanic Family Center each year to receive services and assistance. They represent diverse ethnicities who live in poverty but because of the agency's bilingual

capacity that is part of its mission and vision, many are Latinos, often recent immigrants, who struggle to make a better life for their families. We offer them outpatient and partial care mental health services, youth and family programs, health education services, seniors' programs, addictions programs, and employment and training services. We have earned the trust of the community and as a result, they seek our services with little to no advertising on our part. We feel the crunch of the growth and the needs of our community and are concerned about the slow response from the state in directing resources for Hispanics.

The Latino community in New Jersey experiences poverty at five times the rate of the general population, and does not receive its proportional share of human services, workforce development training, counseling programs and other programs. Governor Corzine has proposed a \$30.9 billion budget and, while it's sensitive to many of New Jersey's vulnerable populations particularly children and youth, we must make sure it does not impose disproportional hardships on the Latino community. We expect our state government to redirect scarce financial resources to ensure equitable services to the Latino community with its exploding growth.

We can see small steps being taken in this direction through a recent RFP issued for an increase in the number of bilingual/bicultural clinicians to

provide mental health services in New Jersey. Due to the shortage of bilingual outpatient services that help individuals suffering with mental illness to remain in their own communities, the Hispanic Directors' Association advocated tirelessly for this initiative. I have attached a copy of the H.D.A.'s roundtable discussion and subsequent eight recommendations about the issues. The result was a rare effort from the State to ensure that specific bilingual services are offered to New Jersey's non-English speaking communities. The focused effort of the State to offer bilingual programs should be replicated to close the enormous gaps that exist for a relatively poor community that is growing in leaps & bounds. The State's commitment to the expansion of outpatient programs for non-English speaking persons should continue. It is the modality of choice for Latinos as demonstrated by the fact that 65% of Hispanics who access the public mental health system, do so in an outpatient setting; notably one of the most under-funded and least expensive components of the mental health system.

While the list is not all inclusive, here are some additional concerns about the proposed budget as it impacts on the Latino community:

1. Special Welfare Initiatives: The \$2 million reduction in appropriations must not affect DHS's targeted outreach to Hispanics that we fought hard to create and is one of very few targeted efforts for Hispanics. There are five initiatives statewide that cover 11 counties offering the working poor opportunities that promote economic self-sufficiency so that they do not enter or re-enter the

- welfare rolls. This \$1million investment is a tremendous cost savings to New Jersey's taxpayers over the alternative of ongoing welfare and other subsidies.
2. Reduction of AIDS grants: The \$1million reduction in appropriations must not affect DOHSS' targeted direct service efforts that include testing, treatment and prevention case management for Hispanics and African Americans.
 3. Preschool Wrap around Co-Pay This budget once again makes the proposal that Abbott parents who have higher incomes and use wrap around services in preschools pay a Co-pay. The cost of administering and collecting this co-pay cannot fall on the community preschools whose budgets are already administratively thin forcing them to operate at a deficit.
 4. Grant to ASPIRA We urge reconsideration of the drastic \$400 thousand reduction in support of our most important program to assist Latino youths to close the gap in educational performance.

I respectfully request that you challenge the administration on their ability to promote greater opportunities for Hispanics to move out of poverty and receive services in New Jersey. I further ask you to oppose the specific cuts cited above. Encourage the administration to work with the Hispanic leadership from Community agencies to find feasible solutions to the state's budgetary problem and booming growth of the Hispanic population. Encourage them to do this in a way that minimizes the negative impact of these budgetary choices so that families and communities are healthy, strong, and have access to services that prevent more costly alternatives for all of New Jersey's taxpayers.