



HISPANIC DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION
of NEW JERSEY

Building Bridges to a Better Life

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Deception by Headline: The Case of North Hudson Community Action Corporation

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For several weeks, there has been an explosion of words represented by dozens of articles about our member agency, North Hudson Community Action Corporation, regarding the rental of property owned by Senator Robert Menendez.

Misrepresentations, half-truths and rumors have dominated the media coverage of this issue fueled by a heated political campaign.

It is time to put this issue in perspective. North Hudson Community Action Corporation, a member agency of the statewide Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey (HDANJ), is a non-profit, community-based organization dedicated to providing services to the neediest residents of New Jersey.

All HDANJ members, including North Hudson Community Action Corporation, are engaged in a constant struggle to secure funds for a wide variety of programs. Securing funds from the federal, state, county and local governments are central to the mission of our agencies, which is to provide assistance to the poorest of the poor.

The suggestion by some that there was something improper about North Hudson working with Congressman, now Senator Menendez, to secure funding is intended to confuse those with little time to look beyond the headlines. North Hudson would have been negligent if it had not sought his assistance. Congressman Menendez would have been negligent if he had not responded. Most federal funding North Hudson receives comes from community block funding which must be approved by the entire Congress.

It is also worth noting that for more than four decades North Hudson Community Action Corporation has received funding from the state and federal governments, whether those governments were controlled by Democrats or Republicans. We are proud to note that Governor Thomas Kean, father of the current Republican senatorial candidate, provided North Hudson with funding during his administration.

There is also the suggestion by some that there was something improper or suspicious in renting a home, a former law office, from then Congressman Menendez for an office for the agency's early education program.

Again, some perspective is in order regarding the rental issue. North Hudson Community Action Corporation has an annual budget of \$47 million. It serves residents in three counties – Hudson, Bergen and Passaic. Its health clinic serves 150,000 patients a year. It paid \$31,000 a year in rent for the office to the congressman. This accounts for a miniscule percentage of the agency's annual budget. Furthermore, the rent was below market value and since Menendez sold the property in 2002, the rent has increased to \$4000 for less space.

This is a mundane rental agreement. Notions that this nondescript transaction was concocted in some backroom with cigar smoking politicians are ludicrous and insulting. It is unfortunate that the North Hudson Community Action Corporation, serving the poor for more than 40 years, should be dragged into the senatorial campaign.

Months from now, small articles buried on the back pages of newspapers or 10-second blurbs on nightly newscasts will announce that there was nothing inappropriate or unusual in this transaction.

But, how many of the thousands now being treated to these sensationalist campaign tactics will read or see these stories? Reputations and good names will be tattered and few will remember exactly why.

-Daniel Santo Pietro, Executive Director of the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey (HDANJ)