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Latino Agenda 2000

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Latino Agenda 2000

Foreword

You have in your hands the Statewide Latino Agenda 2000—a policy agenda developed for and by Latinos in Massachusetts. The creation of this agenda is a milestone for our community. It reflects our collective views on the challenges and opportunities before us. It gives us a tool by which to hold policy makers accountable and is a step toward reversing the marginalization of Latinos in policy decision-making.

Notwithstanding these important benefits, the process by which this agenda was achieved is equally noteworthy. To effect change, people must feel true ownership of the agenda for reform. With this in mind, our approach has been to keep the creation of the agenda as open, democratic, and transparent as possible. Preparatory meetings were held throughout the state; the conference itself was advertised widely throughout the community; and a follow-up statewide meeting was held to guarantee that the final agenda was true to the views expressed at the conference. We can confidently say that the Latino Agenda is truly a product of the community's labor.

We are profoundly grateful for the tireless efforts of community collaborators who labored so effectively to bring this historic gathering of five hundred Latinos and others from across the state. We thank the benefactors who made this process possible: the Hildreth Stewart Charitable Foundation, the National Council of La Raza, Bell Atlantic, the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights-Massachusetts Chapter, Univisión 27 Boston, and the University of Massachusetts Boston. Gratitude is also due the staff of the Gaston Institute who so effectively took on the tasks associated with convening and facilitating this endeavor.

A final comment on this document. Certain changes and developments in specific pieces of legislation may not be reflected in this report due to issues of process and the time constraints involved in the production process. The report represents the state of agreement that was reached after the follow-up meetings at the State House in May 2000. Also, readers should be informed that the views herein are a consensus opinion of broad network of individuals and organizations. They do not represent the views of the Gaston Institute nor the University of Massachusetts.

In the end, the success of this effort will be measured by its continuity. We hope this agenda will be used by Latinos and non-Latinos across the Commonwealth. We expect to replicate this process in years to come. This experience illustrates the will, pride, and caring that characterize those who are committed to bettering our community. It also demonstrates that community-university partnerships are an important element of social change.

Andrés Torres
Director
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October 2000

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Introduction

Few would argue that our community's position is precarious. On the one hand, we are a growing presence in the Commonwealth. In 1995, there were an estimated 344,068 Latinos living in Massachusetts, representing 5.6% of the total state population, a 20% increase since 1990.(1) It is expected that the 2000 census will confirm that Latinos are indeed the largest minority group in the state. Latinos make up an even larger proportion of the total population of a number of key cities, including Lawrence (48%), Chelsea (39%), Holyoke (37%), Springfield (20%), and Boston (12%).(2) Latino youth have formed the largest minority youth population since 1990.(3) As a result, Latino school enrollments have grown to such a degree statewide that Latinos students now make up an even greater proportion of the total public school enrollments in Lawrence (78%), Holyoke (69%), Chelsea (65%), and Boston (26%).(4)

This growth is beginning to bring heightened visibility. There are three Latinos serving as state representatives in Massachusetts. This is a major gain, considering that only one other Latino had ever previously been elected state representative. In the once economically depressed sections of Lawrence, Boston, and Springfield, Latino small business districts have emerged and are thriving by serving an ethnic market. The Latino community is adding to the area's cultural fabric through the arts, ethnic festivals, and the achievements of local sports heroes.

On the other hand, Latinos in Massachusetts continue to experience disproportionate and severe social and economic disadvantage. Consider the following facts: Forty-seven percent of Latino households and 55% of Latino children live below the poverty line;(5) Latino students have the highest school dropout and MCAS failure rates in the state;(6) Latinos are least likely to have health insurance;(7) Latino homeownership rates lag behind most other groups in the state.(8) In short, the overall condition of Latinos is poorer than any other population in Massachusetts, and even worse than Hispanics in most areas of the country.

Because of this situation, we, as a community, have much to gain from purposeful policy development. Yet, it seems that, along with other people of color, we are thrust into the spotlight when it comes to social problems and the need for scapegoats, but are rendered invisible when it comes to participation in strategic decision-making, public discourse, and resource allocation.

Purpose and Goals of the Latino Agenda 2000

The purpose of the Statewide Latino Agenda 2000 is to counter the marginalization of Latinos in policy debates by forming an autonomous policy agenda for Latinos and devising mechanisms to achieve it. The operating principal is the belief that we, as a community, are in the best position to understand our own needs and strengths. It is our own voices that need to be amplified and injected into the policy debates.

The specific aims of the Latino Agenda 2000 are as follows:

1. Make policy recommendations and state the views of Latinos on social, economic, and political issues at the state level.
2. Use a democratic and open process that builds consensus, is truly representative, and develops a permanent constituency for future efforts.
3. Produce an instrument for others to use in advocating on behalf of Latinos in Massachusetts.
4. Create the conditions and impetus for the establishment of a watchdog group to track proposed legislation and publish an annual report card assessing the performance of public officials.

Outline of the Process of Crafting the Agenda

(March 1999-October 2000)

1. In spring 1999, the Gaston Institute developed a concept paper outlining a process for creating the Latino Agenda and distributed it to community leaders across the state. The Gaston Institute agreed to oversee the process for creating the agenda and to serve as facilitator and convenor of a statewide Latino Public Policy Conference in the spring 2000.
2. From August 1999 to January 2000, the Gaston Institute held regional meetings across the state in partnership with community-based organizations in Boston, Lawrence, Springfield, Worcester, Lynn, and New Bedford. A network of regional participants was formed to facilitate communication among the different groups. These meetings identified key issues to be addressed at the statewide conference.
3. In fall 1999, an organizing network comprising representatives of the Latino community-CBOs, academics, activists, and others-was formed to handle program development, publicity, fundraising, and conference logistics.
4. The conference was held in March 2000 in Worcester with some five hundred attendees. It was well received by the community and media. Activities included: a) Updates on what was happening in the various Hispanic communities; b) Policy workshops on education, health, neighborhood development and housing, family and child welfare, economic and small business development, labor and the workplace, and youth; c) A dialogue with elected officials; d) Caucuses on

special topics-intergroup relations, the U.S. military presence in Vieques, and the Census 2000; and; e) Reports from the workshops and the development of a follow-up process.

5. A follow-up meeting to refine the agenda was held in May 2000 at the State House. Participants reviewed the draft agenda and proposed edits and clarifications. Preliminary advocacy strategies were discussed.

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I. Education

There are a number of urgent questions facing Latinos in education. It has been nearly 40 years since Latinos began settling in Massachusetts in large numbers. As the population of Latinos grew and bilingual-education programs were established throughout the state, Latino enrollment in the Massachusetts public schools increased significantly. This growth occurred not just in Boston, but in cities such as Chelsea, Lawrence, Lowell, Springfield, and Worcester.(9)

The increase in the Latino student population throughout the state, however, has not resulted in a corresponding increase in the advancement of educational outcomes for Latinos. After almost 10 years of education-reform initiatives, Latino students remain a vulnerable group. According to 1998 cohort dropout data from the Massachusetts Department of Education, 29 percent of Latino 9th graders in Massachusetts will probably not finish high school; Latinos continue to have the highest dropout rate for any group in the state, almost three times that of white students.(10)

State education-reform initiatives, such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) standardized test, also threaten to widen the disparity between Latino students and other students. Since the first administered MCAS test in 1998, Latino students have had the highest failure rates among all students; in fact, 70 percent and 83 percent of Latino 10th graders failed science and math sections, respectively, in 1998.(11) Moreover, the stakes will be raised in 2001, when 10th graders will be required to obtain a passing score in all sections of the test to graduate from high school.

Equitable access to a high-quality education remains an ongoing goal for Latino parents and their children. The educational achievement of Latino students is of critical importance, not just to the school system, but to the future of the state. Educators, policy makers, and politicians cannot ignore the plight of Latino students and the challenges they face.

I. A. General Response and Recommendations

We support efforts to provide equitable access to a high-quality education for all students. Tests such as the MCAS should be used primarily as diagnostic instruments that help identify systemic inequities in educational resources. The Massachusetts Department of Education, not students and teachers, should be held accountable for these inequities.

Student-level, school-level, and district-level data files on the Massachusetts Public Schools must be made available for public use via the Internet. Data should be available to the public, not just researchers and policy-makers. The democratization of data analysis will allow for multiple interpretations by students, parents, teachers, and principals. We must also improve the quality of collected data so that it contains information on a student's socioeconomic characteristics, student's country of birth, parent's country of birth, and zip code. All personal data should be presented in a format that protects individual anonymity.

Teaching and learning in our public schools should encourage new pedagogies that encourage critical thinking among students. The curricula at all public schools must be evaluated to insure that they reflect the diversity of our nation. Schools must hire and train culturally responsive teachers and principals.

Increased resources must be allocated for teachers and students. Teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities so that they can be proficient in their subject areas, as well as demonstrate their cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical competence. Schools need quality instructional materials, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Cohesive and purposeful policy initiatives must be established whereby Latino parents are integrated into schools through: a) curriculum development, implementation, and assessment processes, b) real "ownership" of their children's education through participation in the decision-making of local school site councils, and c) recognition and implementation of cultural and linguistic academic activities.

We encourage a political initiative that links universities, scholars, community centers, government and businesses, with schools and communities through specific partnerships, mentoring programs, educational training of parents, and childcare provisions that support greater participation of Latino parents.

I. B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- **We oppose the Glodis/Unz Bill.** This legislation will dismantle the bilingual education programs in the Commonwealth.
- **We oppose the use of MCAS as a gatekeeping examination** that punishes students and teachers for the deficiencies and inequities of the public education system in Massachusetts.
- Student-level, school-level, and district-level **data files on the Massachusetts Public Schools should be made available for public use via the Internet.**

- **We endorse the policy recommendations of the 1994 Governor's Commission on Bilingual Education, the Massachusetts Coalition for Bilingual Education, and Massachusetts English Plus.**
- **We oppose policies that seek to dismantle affirmative action programs and initiatives.** Efforts to eliminate race from consideration in admissions and school assignments will further limit the access of historically marginalized minority groups to a quality education. These initiatives should also include hiring of staff and faculty from underrepresented minority groups.
- **We applaud the restoration of Chapter 636 funding.**
- **We insist on the enforcement of federal laws (e.g., Plyler v. Doe) designed to protect the rights of K- 12 students to a public education.**
- **We oppose any referendum banning bilingual education** and any measure banning the use of native languages to enhance teaching and learning.
- We call for the provision of **additional resources for districts faced with the challenges of educating low-literacy students.**
- **We advocate for resources and funding to support whole-school change** and community partnerships to improve Latino students' achievement, access, and family involvement.
- **Funding for new education reform should be equitable, not simply "equal."** The Department of Education should present a yearly plan and assessment of its goals and progress toward establishing more equitable educational goals in terms of class, race, and gender.
- We support **expanded funding for early childhood education.**
- We endorse the provision of **financial resources to undocumented residents who wish to attend college and to families with pre-school children.**
- **We oppose the use of vouchers** as a solution for the inequities of public education. The voucher concept implies that education is the responsibility of private citizens. Free, quality public education is a constitutional right, not a privilege.
- **We call for greater Latino representation,** chosen by Latino parents, on the boards of K- 12 and higher education with full participation and inclusion in decision-making processes.

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II. Health

There is a wide disparity between the health status of Latinos and that of the majority population. Latino mothers are less likely to receive prenatal care than the general population; Latino infants are more likely to be victims of infant mortality and suffer from low birth weight; substance abuse and violence account for a disproportionate number of injuries and deaths among young Latino adults; Latinos are the largest group among primary heroin users (22%), and represent 16% of primary marijuana users; Among Latinos in the 25-44 age group, AIDS and HIV-related diseases are the leading causes of death; Latinos represent 18% of all AIDS cases in Massachusetts and 20% of AIDS cases in Boston.(12)

Lack of access to health care compounds this critical condition. Some 25% of Latinos in Massachusetts are without health insurance.(13) They are more than twice as likely to be uninsured than the general population, and have the lowest rates of health insurance of all groups in Massachusetts. Without health insurance, Latinos have little or no access to the most basic preventive medicine services.

II. A. General Response and Recommendation

In light of this alarming condition, Latinos strongly advocate for viewing health broadly. We support the World Health Organization definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of a disease or infirmity. With respect to policy solutions, we maintain the view that health status can be impacted by attention to both broad-based cultural and political issues as well as by targeted quality improvement initiatives of medical care providers and insurers.

II. B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- **We applaud passage of the Emergency Medical Interpreters Bill**, HB 1172 (Rep. Barrios), which was signed into law in April 2000. We encourage outreach to involve the Latino community in developing this legislation, specifically to define a high standard for competent interpretation so that interpreters are trained in medical terminology.
- **We applaud passage of the Diabetes Bill** (Sen. Jacques), which mandates insurance coverage for preventative care for diabetics.

- **We endorse the Health Care Initiative which will appear on the November 2000 ballot.** This initiative seeks to protect the rights of patients and promote access to quality health care for all residents of the Commonwealth. There are three principal provisions in this referendum item: 1) Universal Access for all Massachusetts residents, including reducing language and cultural barriers to quality services, 2) a Patient Bill of Rights and Protections, and 3) a Moratorium on for-profit conversions until such time as the elements of Universal Access have been met.
- **We support the Latino Health Equity Resolution.** This resolution calls for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to: 1) formally adopt the goal of eliminating disparities in health status on or before 2010; 2) grant official recognition and support to the Latino Health Policy Council in planning, implementing, and monitoring the systematic reduction and progressive elimination of excess Latino morbidity and mortality in the Commonwealth; and 3) identify and allocate sufficient resources throughout the decade to accomplish this goal. We emphasize the importance of attaining gender equity and the importance of insuring real community participation in the implementation of these goals.
- **We must greatly improve the share of state funds that go to preventive health-care programs.**
- There is a wide-ranging public constituency in favor of these health-care reforms. We should employ a more effective strategy **using the media and the Internet to inform the public and elected officials** about the breadth of support for these ideas.

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III. Neighborhood Development and Housing

There is little doubt that Massachusetts is in the midst of a housing crisis. In 1998, owner-occupied housing and rental unit vacancy rates were lower in Massachusetts than anywhere else in the country. Further, from 1980 to 1997, Massachusetts's home prices increased faster than home prices in any other state. The housing crisis disproportionately affects Latinos because Latinos households tend to be younger, larger, headed by a woman, and renting instead of owning their dwellings.(14)

Redlining and other forms of discrimination pose further challenges to Latinos. A study commissioned by the Gaston Institute found that Latinos are the most underserved group in the mortgage industry in Massachusetts.(15) The housing problem is critical because asset creation in the form of homeownership may mean the difference between being low-income and belonging to the middle-class. For too many Latinos, the American dream of homeownership is elusive.

III. A. General Response and Recommendation

There must be an overall policy developed that promotes neighborhood stability. Although high rates of mobility are common for Latino households, often this mobility is involuntary. Residential instability is largely the consequence of low incomes, increasingly unaffordable housing and low homeownership rates. Neighborhood stability is important to educational achievement, health, and the attainment of political power. While public policy may have a limited effect on mobility and the creation of neighborhood stability, certain policy measures, such as rent control, can address some of the underlying causes.

III. B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Policy Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- **Pass a bill to provide \$35 million to help protect affordable housing.** There are over 19,000 housing units that are currently affordable, but soon may disappear due to the loss of subsidies and use restrictions. The legislature should pass this bill in order to help preserve the affordability of these units.
- As recommended by the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, **2% of the state budget should be earmarked for affordable housing.** These resources are needed to help protect affordable

housing, expand proven housing programs, and establish new programs, such as a Housing Allowance for families in the transition from welfare to work, and an Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

- **The Governor should raise the annual cap on spending on bonds** to access more quickly funds for new affordable housing and for preservation of existing units.
- **We support aggressive enforcement of anti-discrimination and fair-lending laws** and the promotion of inclusionary zoning laws.
- We encourage the Commonwealth to develop a **statewide program to provide workshops on money management to existing and prospective homeowners.**
- **In the area of public housing, we endorse "one-to-one replacement" of units lost to remodeling.** Often, modernization of public housing results in loss of units. While in some instances there may be good public policy reasons for this (e.g., reduction of density in crowded developments), the resulting loss of affordable units increases the pressure on low-income tenants in overheated housing markets. Public-housing units lost to modernization or demolition must be replaced in a form that ensures long-term availability to low-income families.
- **We encourage research into new definitions and estimates of poverty** that take into account the income level required for true self-sufficiency.
- **We encourage local municipalities to adopt housing policies that are sensitive to the needs of low- and middle-income families:** 1) increase the level of local revenues dedicated to affordable housing by dedicating a greater share of incremental tax revenues toward housing and developing linkage programs; 2) develop new or strengthen existing laws to protect tenants against evictions; 3) target a greater share of housing resources to low-income families; 4) promote alternative models of housing tenure, such as limited-equity cooperatives; 5) develop policies to promote neighborhood stability; 6) provide tax relief for low-income homeowners; and (7) develop linkage programs, areas of the state that are enjoying a commercial real-estate boom should develop linkage approaches that require developers to make contributions to affordable housing.
- We recommend the following to the Financial/Banking community: 1) Large banks such as Fleet should continue to expand their **targeting of mortgage credit to Hispanic borrowers**; 2) Local lenders need to do a better job of **providing mortgage loans to Hispanic homebuyers in their communities**; 3) The major mortgage companies should **seek out business in cities with high levels of Hispanic residents** as aggressively as they do elsewhere in Massachusetts; 4) **Banks should increase the number of Latino loan officers**, especially in light of the fact that in the recent bank consolidations a number the few Latino loan officers in major private banks lost their jobs; 5) There should be an effort to **increase the number of Latinos in decision-making positions**, e.g., boards of directors, executive committees, etc.

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IV. Economic and Small Business Development

There is a disconnect between growth and equity in Massachusetts. The extraordinary economic expansion experienced by the Commonwealth in the late 1990s has largely bypassed the communities where the majority of Latinos reside. The Latino population in Massachusetts is heavily concentrated in central cities. These cities continue to struggle with poverty rates that are far higher than the state and national averages. For example, in 1995, the most recent year for which data are available, the poverty rate in Holyoke was 29%, 30% for Lawrence, 24% for Lowell, and 22% for Springfield.[\(16\)](#)

Paradoxically, these pockets of poverty exhibit a significant degree of economic activity. Latino entrepreneurs have revitalized many of the business districts in Latino neighborhoods. However, despite increasing levels of economic activity, there are no links to the booming sectors of the economy. Conference participants discussed the need for the benefits of economic activity to be distributed equitably.

An important element contributing to the economic development of the Latino community is small business. Latino-owned small businesses have been a critical component of community economic development. From 1987 to 1992, the number of Latino firms in the Commonwealth more than doubled to 6,914 (half of them located in Boston) and their revenue almost tripled to \$508 million.[\(17\)](#) Despite the entrepreneurial promise of the Latino business sector and the potential positive effect on community economic development, many of these businesses face formidable obstacles, including limited access to capital and barriers to contracting.

IV. A. General Response and Recommendation

Latino small businesses represent an important but untapped asset for many of the Commonwealth's larger cities, including Lawrence, Boston, Springfield, and Holyoke.

While Latinos as individuals have comparatively low levels of income, we should consider the fact that they tend to live in dense urban areas. In this sense, it can be said that the collective community income for Latinos is fairly high. The Latino community should balance political strategies for equity with economic strategies focused on business ownership.

IV. B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Policy Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- In the area of education and training, we support the following policies: 1) The state SBA office, SOMWBA, community colleges, and other training providers should **offer long-term education modules that provide training in Spanish** and offer mentoring programs tailored to the needs of the Latino small-business community. Many Latino small-business owners have significant educational needs that cannot be met by the standard workshop formats used in the industry; 2) State-sponsored **training offered to small businesses should be evaluated for quality and effectiveness**; and 3) The state should **enact a tax incentive for training and education of small-business owners**.
- To significantly improve access to capital for the Hispanic community, we endorse the following proposals: 1) Provide **operational resources for state-sponsored alternative lenders**; 2) **Fund pilot projects for commercial planning** that promote business diversity and neighborhood improvement; and 3) Conduct a **one-day conference on capital formation in the Latino community**.
- The state should **sponsor a project to encourage Latino small-business development**.
- We support the **lowering of profit thresholds for foreign business owners operating in the U.S. to be automatically granted a green card**. This would help facilitate the attainment of residency status for Latino business operators.
- The state should **increase Latino participation in Massport business missions to foreign countries**.
- Participation in the technological advances of society is key for Latinos. We need to **promote involvement of our community in this area so that we are not left behind by the growing digital divide**. We also need to take advantage of the Latino resources-human and economic-that are already-involved in the high-tech industry.

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V. Labor, the Workplace, and Workforce Development

The labor market poses numerous challenges to Latino workers in Massachusetts. Among these, conference participants identified a number of priority issues. These include protections for unorganized workers, expanding worker-rights education, outreach, and greater employment and training opportunities as the priority issues. In both urban and rural areas, Latinos are disproportionately clustered into temporary and contingent jobs, often with no legal recourse due to their immigration status. Many have no knowledge of existing workplace protections, including anti-discrimination statutes. In labor unions, Latinos have had some successes in being recognized, but are seemingly invisible in the ranks of officers and local staff. Moreover, under new federal job-training legislation that took effect this past July, Latinos face further challenges in accessing much-needed education and training.

V. A. General Response and Recommendation

Links must be established between Latino CBOs and the workforce development system: There is little articulation between Latino community organizations and the official training and employment system operated by the Commonwealth under the Workforce Investment Act. These CBOs need to be given opportunities to provide training and placement services, since they are the institutions most accessible to unemployed Hispanics. A number of ideas exist for improving Latino CBO participation: funding innovative education/training partnerships between CBOs, community colleges, and religious organizations; funding internships and management training programs; developing sectoral strategies to support incumbent Latino workers; targeting workers in low-wage industries for career-ladder training; and conducting research on the strengths and weaknesses of CBO participation in the workforce development system.

V. B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Policy Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- **We support the Workplace Equity Bill:** benefits for full-time, part-time and temporary workers.
- **We endorse the Fairness in Unemployment Compensation Bill.**
- The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (**MCAD**) **needs to be held accountable on anti-discrimination enforcement**, especially in the area of community education and outreach. The MCAD should enforce the same protections for undocumented workers as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) does at the national level.

- We endorse strategies to **improve significantly the incorporation of Latino CBOs into the state's new workforce development system.**
- **We urge the loosening of time limits for welfare recipients.** Participation in education and training programs should be counted as part of community service for welfare recipients.
- We insist that the **state hold the line on Affirmative Action in employment.**
- Regarding treatment of immigrant workers, we endorse: 1) **a general amnesty**, as proposed by the AFL-CIO and immigrant rights organizations; 2) an end to employer sanctions; and 3) federal legislation that grants **immediate legalization for Central Americans who fled civil strife during the 1980s.** (For more recommendations on these issues see the Immigration section below.)

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VI. Family and Child Welfare

Our families and children continue to face the persistent problem of poverty and all that poverty entails. Poor children are more likely to be sick and underweight as toddlers; less likely to be ready for kindergarten; more likely to fall behind as grade-schoolers; face a much higher prospect of dropping out of high school; more likely to become teen parents; face far greater odds of being either a victim or a perpetrator of crime; far less likely to be economically successful as adults.⁽¹⁸⁾ For Latinos in Massachusetts, many of the related effects of poverty are an everyday reality as detailed in other sections of this report.

The tools we have as a community to combat poverty are greatly reduced. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 drastically changed the way this nation handles poverty. Time limits were placed on welfare recipients and a work-first strategy was implemented. Massachusetts, in particular, adopted one of the more punitive welfare systems, placing a two-year clock on welfare benefits and implementing a more restricted definition of work than the federal law.

There are preliminary indications that this new poverty-eradication strategy is not working well for Latinos. In March 1999, Latinos accounted for 39% of the welfare rolls, an increase from past years.⁽¹⁹⁾ This calls into question the success of the program with respect to moving Latinos out of poverty.

Many Latino families are working hard to move out of poverty. However, working families in Massachusetts often have to make a choice between using a significant fraction their earnings for childcare or piecing together less desirable contingent childcare arrangements. A University of Massachusetts Boston and Parents United for Child Care study revealed that of Massachusetts children in childcare, a remarkable two-thirds were left in informal settings. In addition, a similar study found that some mothers, particularly Latinas, less frequently select preschool, relying heavily on family members and family daycare. Childcare is a critical issue for Latinos because Latino families include more children: 1.85 per family compared with .87 for white families and 1.47 for African American families. Almost one-third of Latina mothers are working outside the home.

VI. A. General Response and Recommendation

Regarding the restructuring of support programs, there is a tremendous need for educating recipients and the general public about changes in the system. Regulations, eligibility, and entitlements are being tightened up in housing, health care, employment and training, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and foster care. In addition, services are being disaggregated, making it more difficult for individuals to receive integrated care and attention. This requires a more informed citizenry to be able to advocate for their entitlements. For example, losing welfare does not mean that one loses your housing subsidy. Undocumented adults may not be eligible for welfare or health services, but their children continue to be eligible for services and benefits. We need to make sure that our families are getting the right information about these issues.

VI. B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Policy Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- We **oppose the cut in state taxes proposed** by the Governor.
- We **support legislation requiring interpreter services in state social service programs** (Rep. Barrios)
- We support an **increase in the basic welfare grant**, which has been held constant since 1988.
- Regarding welfare restructuring we believe that: 1) Welfare **recipients should be permitted to use time spent on schooling and training** (including participation in two-year college programs) toward their community service requirements and should not be forced to move out of degree programs into shorter-term coursework; and 2) There should be **better monitoring of waiver requests and denial rates to insure a more humane treatment of the poor.**
- We call for an **initiative increasing the quantity and quality of childcare services available to Latino families.** This effort should: a) emphasize the principles of affordability, quality, and accessibility, b) envision childcare workers as professionals, deserving of decent wages and good working conditions, c) ensure that childcare programs are culturally sensitive to the communities they serve, d) avoid pitting welfare recipients against "working mothers," and e) hold accountable the childcare bureaucracy in the Commonwealth.
- We insist on **civil rights compliance on language issues relating to welfare and other support programs.** We encourage class-action suits on behalf of clients who lost welfare benefits or other services because they received notification in English only.
- We insist that the **Department of Transitional Assistance and other key agencies inform and educate clients, in their native language, about waiver rights and entitlements.** We should explore the possibility of amending the state Constitutional Charter to mandate the state to provide more humanely for its needy and poor, as was done in New York State.
- We advocate for **inclusion of undocumented immigrants in entitlement programs** and for improved enforcement of existing civil rights.

- We need to pay more attention to the critical situation of Latino foster children. The state should **fund research into the condition of Latino foster children, a subject about which little is known.** In the area of Child Protective Services, there is need for more effective training for state employees. There also is a need for increased assistance and bilingual counseling for children and families involved with Child Protective Services.
- We should make special efforts **to include Latino men in discussions about family issues.** Too often it is assumed that the topics of child-rearing, household management, and parental involvement in schooling are to be left to the women in the family. Latino males must be brought into these roles more actively and supported to do so.

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VII. Youth

Among all Massachusetts youth nineteen years of age or younger, Latinos are the second-largest group, second only to whites, and they are the largest minority youth population. From 1990 to 1995, estimates suggest that the number of Latino youth in Massachusetts increased by 13.5 percent.⁽²⁰⁾ This growth in Latino youth population is reflected in school enrollments across the state. In 1997, 92,306 Latino students were enrolled in the public schools of Massachusetts, representing 9.7% of the total number of children enrolled in grades K-12, an increase of 81.5% since 1987, when there were 50,866 enrolled.⁽²¹⁾

Despite their growing numbers in the state's public school system, Hispanics face a severe disparity in educational attainment compared with other racial/ethnic groups. Among all individuals between the ages of 16 and 24, Hispanics have the highest percentage of nonenrollment (21.9%) and the lowest proportion of high-school completion (44.8%).⁽²²⁾

The MCAS tests threaten to further widen the educational gap for Latinos. In 1998, 83 % of Latino 10th graders failed the math portion MCAS test.⁽²³⁾ In 1999, the percentage who failed that section of the test increased to 85%.⁽²⁴⁾ In science and technology, the failure rates increased even more, from 80% in 1998 to 85% in 1999.

VII. A. General Response and Recommendation

This situation demands attention by policy makers and others to find ways of meeting the needs of youth. Youth delegates to the conference recommend that all state representatives and senators take the MCAS in order to experience firsthand what youth feel about this test. The MCAS should not be a mandatory requirement for receiving a high-school diploma.

VII.B Specific Legislative Recommendations, Policy Proposals, and Other Action Steps

- There are three bills of special concern to youth, which we recommend for review. We propose to adopt formal recommendations upon further analysis:

1) H4670, an act relative to alternative education and school safety. This applies to students who get suspended ten or more days or expelled from secondary school. In particular we are **concerned that the criteria for suspension or expulsion are defined properly and applied consistently to all ethnic groups without bias;**

2) H2672, a bill that would create a scholarship endowment program for low-income, high-risk students. More analysis must be conducted to determine how applicable this program would be to Latino youth or prospective college students. Specifically, we need to examine how income eligibility is determined and how "high risk" is defined;

3) H5000, a bill that would relocate programs within the Department of Youth Services (DYS), currently within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to the Department of Public Safety. This bill was defeated this session, but we expect it will be re-introduced next year. We are **concerned that such legislation would shift more youth under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.** We caution against such a measure without extensive evaluation of what this means for treatment of youth.

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VIII. Immigration

One out of ten Massachusetts residents is a non-citizen immigrant. In fact, Massachusetts ranks seventh in the nation in terms of the number of immigrant workers.(25) In 1996, President Clinton signed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), one of the most anti-immigrant pieces of legislation to become law in the United States since the National Quota Origins Act of 1924 established national-origin quotas in American law. (26) While the law was a Draconian response to the backlash against illegal immigration, many of IIRIRA's provisions were aimed at legal immigrants and their families.

Some of the harshest provisions include increasing the income requirement that U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents must meet in order to sponsor a family member. Those individuals who want to reunite with a family member must now earn more than 125% of the poverty level (or \$20,875 for a family of four in 1999), essentially preventing many low-income Latinos from reuniting with their family members.(27) IIRIRA also expanded the definition of an "aggravated felony," resulting in the deportation of legal immigrants who committed a criminal offense a long time ago and who have since then maintained a clean record. IIRIRA also made it more difficult for a person in deportation proceedings to be able to stay in the country. It replaced suspension of deportation with "cancellation or removal," a procedure with a much higher standard that many undocumented immigrants will be unable to meet.(28) Additionally, under IIRIRA an undocumented immigrant who is "unlawfully present" in the U.S. for a specified time period can be barred from re-entering the U.S. for either three or ten years.

Since 1996, a nationwide campaign of immigrant rights advocates have worked together to undo the damage caused by IIRIRA. The "Fix '96 Campaign" has successfully resulted in several members of Congress introducing legislation designed to address some of the most onerous provisions. The momentum generated by the nationwide campaign also resulted in the AFL-CIO changing its position on several immigration issues. In early 2000, the AFL-CIO issued a statement supporting the repeal of employer sanctions, as well as the legalization of Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans who have been denied refugee status and those individuals who were unfairly denied amnesty by the INS in the late 1980s.

As of late 2000, the one piece of legislation that has generated the most attention is the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act of 2000, which was introduced in July 2000 by Senator Kennedy and is co-sponsored by 14 senators. This bill would

grant Central American immigrants excluded under the Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) the opportunity to legalize their status; restore Section 245(i), which would allow immigrants applying for permanent residency to remain in the U.S.; and change the registry cut-off date to 1986, which would allow immigrants denied amnesty in the late 1980s the opportunity to adjust their status. The bill, however, has succumbed to political maneuvers and there is no certainty that it will be considered before Congress adjourns for the year.

VIII.A. General Response and Recommendation

We are greatly concerned about the punitive nature of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act. Although there is continued anti-immigrant sentiment in Congress, there are reasons to believe that conditions are ripe for changes in the immigration law:

- 1) Unprecedented economic growth. The U.S. has enjoyed a very long period of sustained economic growth. Immigrants have been a major force behind this growth. There are perceived labor shortages in many industries, including those that traditionally employ immigrant labor (e.g., hotels, restaurants, health care, child care). Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and business leaders have called for increased immigration as a way of addressing labor shortages and stemming potential inflation and economic slow down.
- 2) Labor unions, who have traditionally opposed liberal immigration measures, realize that most of their potential constituents are immigrants. In its Executive Council meeting of February 2000, the AFL-CIO publicly declared itself against employer sanctions, in favor of a general amnesty, and in favor of the immediate legalization of Central Americans and Haitians who were denied refugee status;
- 3) Election year. This year we will be electing the next President of the United States. The candidates have been courting the Latino vote, considered an important "swing vote." Immigration is a top priority for the close to 50% of Latinos who are foreign-born.

Although the Massachusetts State Legislature does not have the authority to change provisions of federal legislation, we urge the State Legislature and local governments to enact a declaration supporting measures currently pending in Congress to ameliorate the law's harshest provisions. These measures are all included under the "Fix '96 Campaign" which encompasses the efforts of immigration advocates throughout the United States.

VIII.B. Specific Legislative Recommendations, Policy Proposals and Action Steps

We support the specific measures under the "Fix '96 Campaign" which include:

- 1) **Repeal expedited removal procedures/Restore judiciary review.** Presently, low-level immigration officials are authorized to decide (for example, in airports and at the border) whether refugees' claims for political asylum are valid. This practice reverses earlier policy that permitted these refugees to prepare a case and present it in court;
- 2) **Repeal stringent income requirements** that make it very difficult for U.S. naturalized citizens/legal permanent residents to petition for admission of a close relative;
- 3) **Provide immediate legalization of individuals who**, due to the incompetence of the Immigration and Naturalization Services, did not have their paperwork duly processed and **were left out of the general amnesty program of 1986 (Late Amnesty)**;
- 4) **Grant immediate legalization of Guatemalans, Haitians, Hondurans, and Salvadorans, who were in the U.S. by December 1, 1995, and who were denied refugee status**;
- 5) **Oppose a national I.D. program.** Analyses of I.D. programs have shown that they result in employers discriminating against those individuals perceived to be foreign, specifically Latinos and Asians;
- 6) **Restore public benefits for legal permanent residents.** Currently immigrants who adjusted their status to that of legal permanent residents after 1996 do not qualify for many public benefits.
- 7) **Repeal the "law of retroactivity."** Long-time, legal permanent residents who committed misdemeanors can be deported, even if they have served a sentence, such as performing community service or paying fines, and the crime was committed many years ago;
- 8) **Restore 245(i).** This provision allows immigrants who have been undocumented to adjust their status to legal permanent resident through the family petition process by paying a \$1,000 fine instead of being barred from entering the U.S. for 3 to 10 years as currently stands;

9) **Repeal employer sanctions.** Both independent and government studies have found that, as predicted when they were enacted, employer sanctions have caused discrimination against those workers perceived to be foreign, particularly Latinos and Asians;

10) **Support a general amnesty.** Undocumented immigrants make enormous contributions to their communities and workplaces yet live in constant fear of the INS. These vulnerable individuals are also subject to exploitation by unscrupulous employers;

11) **Ratify key provisions of treaties of the International Labor Organization,** including the right to freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively.

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IX. Intergroup Relations Among Latinos

Latinos are not a monolithic group. The Latino community is diverse, comprising populations whose countries of origin are spread geographically across many regions of Central and South America and the Caribbean. Many racial, ethnic, and cultural differences exist among these groups, as well as differences in political outlook and life experience. Even subtle differences in Spanish-language usage can result in a feeling of unease among the different subgroups. While this diversity enhances the richness of Latino culture, absent mutual understanding it can also create schisms and divisions within the larger Latino community.

IX.A. Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed internally to the Latino Community itself.

- **We need to build political coalitions based on shared practical goals and needs.** Our political coalitions need to recognize where we come from as distinctive communities with our own national and migration histories, and where we are going, or, what we are specifically trying to accomplish. If we coalesce to accomplish specific goals for improving our communities, we are better able to build political coalitions;
- It is important to **involve the next generation as we build communities** that affirm our shared cultural values, including valuing of family, elders, and religious commitments or spirituality. At the same time, it is important to recognize that young people born in the United States, as well as those who immigrated as children, live between two worlds, and are themselves creating a third way, which will, hopefully, bring together the best of both worlds. Young people, second- and third-generation Latinos/as, are speaking a mix of English and Spanish and want to be able to communicate freely without language prejudice;
- We need to **build unity that values and recognizes differences among Latinos, especially the diversity in race, ethnicity, and social class.** To do so, we need to acknowledge the social prejudices, both in our nations of origin and in this country, which include race, ethnicity, and social class. The problem of racism in the Latino community is critical and needs to be brought out into the open.

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X. Vieques

Since 1941, the United States Navy has occupied two-thirds of Vieques, an island off the east coast of Puerto Rico. During this time, the Navy has used the island as a training ground for military exercises, including live-ammunition target practice. For nearly 60 years, the 9,300 inhabitants of Vieques have endured the inherent risks associated with living so close to an area utilized for military maneuvers. Moreover, the Navy has admitted using hazardous and toxic weapons that have been banned for use near civilian populations, including napalm, depleted uranium bullets, and cluster bombs.⁽²⁹⁾ Furthermore, the high incidence of cancer on Vieques has led to questions about the possible impact on the population of toxic waste, dust, and particles produced by these hazardous materials.⁽³⁰⁾

The issue of Vieques has been an ongoing controversy in Puerto Rico, as well as among the mainland Puerto Rican population for a long time. However, the U.S. public only recently became aware of the Vieques situation after the tragic death of David Sanes Rodriguez, a civilian security guard, who was killed by a stray bomb in April 1999. His death galvanized protesters, who occupied the target range for more than one year. These protesters succeeded in stopping the military maneuvers until May 2000, when the U.S. military seized the range and arrested more than two hundred protesters. The Navy has since resumed its use of Vieques as a military training ground, albeit with "dummy" bombs.

In January 2000, President Clinton issued a statement regarding the continuing use of Vieques by the Navy. According to his order, by 2002, the people of Puerto Rico must vote on a referendum on whether to continue military training on the island. Until then, any training on Vieques must not include live fire and the military will be limited to ninety days of training on the island. The President also promised \$40 million in economic aid to assess the health, safety, environmental, and economic concerns of the residents of Vieques, and asked Congress to begin transferring title of the target area from the Navy to Puerto Rico.

In Massachusetts, a number of city councils have passed resolutions calling for the immediate withdrawal of the Navy from Vieques. In September 1999, the U.S. House of Representatives introduced legislation to transfer jurisdiction of the Navy-occupied section of the island to Puerto Rico. While twenty-eight members have signed on to the legislation,

including three Massachusetts and ten Latino representatives, there has been no action taken on the bill since its introduction. In the meantime, Puerto Ricans continue to protest the Navy's ongoing military exercises on the island.

X.A. Specific Legislative Recommendations

- **We urge the State Legislature to pass a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of the Navy from Vieques and for funding to cleanup of the island.**
- **We similarly urge Senators Edward F. Kennedy and John F. Kerry to initiate equivalent resolutions in the Congress.**
- **We applaud the city councils of Amherst, Cambridge, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Westfield for passing resolutions on the immediate withdrawal of the U.S. Navy from Vieques.** We commend the Boston City Council for its letter to President Clinton, calling for an Executive Order to close the naval facilities on Vieques.

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XI. Next Steps

Many of those who were involved in the process of building the agenda voiced the opinion that its success will be determined, ultimately, by the continuity of effort it produces. Participants identified a number of key follow-up steps:

- 1) Develop the Latino Agenda as a major instrument for the community to use as a strategic plan for action.
- 2) Institutionalize an agenda-building process every two years that identifies the challenges and opportunities facing the Latino community.
- 3) Increase the level of coordination among the diverse subgroups, organizations, and leaders in the community so that the effectiveness of each is enhanced for the benefit of the larger community.

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Notes

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