

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sara McElmurry, Communications Coordinator
312-351-3890 ▪ smcelmurry@latinopolicyforum.org



phone 312-376-1766
fax 312-376-1760
web latinopolicyforum.org
20 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1550
Chicago, IL 60604

Push for Preschool: Chicago Latino Leaders, Parents Trek to Springfield
Latino Policy Forum Lobby Day represents united Latino voice supporting education

EDITOR'S NOTE: An advocacy training session will be held on Monday, April 19 at Erie Neighborhood House (1701 W. Superior, Chicago). Media are invited to the session between noon and 1pm to photograph and interview Lobby Day participants in advance of their departure to Springfield. Buses will leave Chicago at 7am from El Valor (2434 S. Kildare, Chicago) on Tuesday, April 20. For more information or to arrange an advance interview with participant, contact Sara McElmurry at 312-351-3890 or smcelmurry@latinopolicyforum.org.

CHICAGO – April 14, 2010 – Dozens of parents, preschool administrators, and non-profit leaders, representing multiple community organizations, will meet with state legislators to discuss concerns about cuts proposed to preschool and early care programs in the State's 2011 operating budget. The group will travel from Chicago to Springfield on Tuesday, April 20 as part of a Lobby Day organized by the Latino Policy Forum.

"We're all concerned about the budget. We've all seen the doom-and-gloom headlines," said Sylvia Puente, executive director of the Latino Policy Forum. "But the proposed cuts to preschool – especially in growing Latino communities – aren't the solution to our economic woes. In fact, these cuts will only worsen the situation for everyone in Illinois. That's what's driving us down to Springfield."

If approved, Governor Quinn's proposed budget cuts mean that Illinois early childhood education programs will have lost \$92 million in funding since FY 2009. Given that Illinois' Latino community has accounted for 90 percent of the state's population growth since 2000 and that one-in-four Illinois children under age five is Latino, the cuts would go even deeper for already-struggling preschool programs, critical for Latinos' academic success.

"The cuts to the Illinois budget disproportionately impact the Latino community," said Maria Esther Lopez, director of institutional advancement at El Valor and co-chair of the Latino Policy Forum's early childhood education work group. "As it is, if we were to just maintain existing budget levels, in essence, the Latino community would already experience a significant cut. Early childhood education is critical in setting the foundation for the skill sets of our future workforce. We are going to Springfield to deliver the message that our state's and our country's competitive edge and economic future are inextricably linked with the academic preparation of our state's Latino children."

Across Illinois, the Latino high school dropout rate is 43 percent. Given that Latinos comprise 15 percent of Illinois' workforce – and that the percentage will grow considerably in a generation's time – the dropout statistic has significant economic implications. Research shows that an achievement gap exists between Latinos and their peers before kindergarten, a fact that suggests that improved access to quality preschool programs is key. Currently, early childhood education programs simply are not accessible in many predominately-Latino communities. What's more, the limited number of available programs, particularly in areas of new suburban growth, must be enhanced to culturally reflect the needs of Latino youth.

-more-

Push for Preschool//2

In light of these necessary improvements, the Latino Policy Forum recommends that at least 25 percent of grants and subsidies for early care and education be directed to Latino children, reflecting the statistic that a quarter of Illinois children under age five are Latino.

“It’s absolutely critical to maintain early childhood education funding. This dramatic cut to the state budget would severely impact the ability for low-income Latino children to receive a high quality education throughout these important developmentally formative years.” said Celena Roldan, Executive Director of Erie Neighborhood House and member of the Latino Policy Forum’s early childhood education work group. “We must urgently level the pre-K playing field for Latino children to guarantee a competitive Illinois workforce in the future.”

Organizations participating in the Lobby Day include Erie Neighborhood House, Casa Central, Onward Neighborhood Houses, El Valor, Through a Child’s Eyes, El Hogar del Niño, and Christopher House.

About the Latino Policy Forum

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the region whose primary focus is to facilitate the inclusion of Latinos at all levels in public policy and decision-making processes. Founded in Chicago in 1988 as Latinos United, the Forum provides research, information, advocacy and leadership development to improve education outcomes for Latino children, ameliorate the mortgage foreclosure crisis for Latino families, deepen our roots through sound immigration and immigrant integration policy, and build leadership and a common collective agenda. For more information, visit www.latinopolicyforum.org.

###