

An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective

Latino Policy Forum
Formerly Latinos United

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Preface

We are pleased to present in this policy agenda the voices, hopes and vision for a better future for Latinos in the Chicago metropolitan region. The findings and recommendations in this document come primarily from a series of community meetings that Latinos United convened in 2006-2007 with civic leaders, religious organizations, business, elected officials and community activists. The process of gathering more than 600 Latinos from different backgrounds to develop a policy agenda was a great exercise in civic participation.

This document also incorporates relevant recommendations from four recent reports that address Latino and immigrant issues: The State of Latino Chicago and Forging the Tools for Unity by the University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies; A Shared Future: The Economic Engagement of Greater Chicago and Its Mexican Community by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs; and For the Benefit of All by the New American Policy Council. We were pleased to find that most of the recommendations that resulted from our dialogue with regional participants dovetailed with the recommendations identified in these reports. There is a high level of agreement about the policies needed to ensure that Latinos have support and opportunities to fully participate in the social, economic and political activities of our region.

Demographic projections indicate that by 2030 Latinos will constitute one third of the total population in the Chicago region. This data prompted Latinos United to develop this American Agenda from a Latino Perspective that serves as a blueprint to achieve equality and opportunity in education, housing, health care, employment, immigration and other issues that affect the quality of life of this community. The growth of the Latino population across the nation has shifted and is now based primarily on births rather than immigration. This historic demographic realignment challenges American society to rethink the relationship it has established with Latinos. The tendency to see and treat us as foreigners who do not belong is contradicted by the fact that 90 percent of Latino children in the Chicago region are U.S. citizens by birth.¹

Increasingly, the cultural and political strength, and economic competitiveness and economic growth of our country and our region will depend on the capacity of Latinos to play leadership roles. To meet this challenge, our society must make a political and ethical commitment to eliminate the barriers that prevent Latinos from achieving their full potential. New policies and a greater investment of resources are urgent to change the inadequate educational systems that fail to teach too many of our children and keep them warehoused in overcrowded, under-resourced schools.

A stronger sense of equity must exist in our society to address the housing issues that affect Latino families. Overcrowded housing, sub-prime loans, predatory lending and foreclosures are problems that disproportionately affect Latinos. The value of fairness must prevail in the immigration policy debate to avoid scapegoating immigrants and to find humane solutions that prevent separating U.S. born children from their parents. A comprehensive remedy must be negotiated to address a clearly broken immigration system. Parallel to a political agenda, our society must articulate a moral agenda to fulfill its obligations to the public good and to transcend the racial and ethnic tensions that prevent us from taking responsibility for one another and our collective future.

These tensions play out in all sorts of ways: for example, at a public meeting in the suburbs, a resident said Latino residents have felt pressured to remove the rosaries from their rear-view mirrors because the police were using these to identify and selectively stop drivers. These rosaries are not merely decorative but expressions of deep faith, and having to remove these religious symbols leaves many with a strong feeling of vulnerability. Latinos feel blamed for everything wrong that happens in society. Families worry about the impact that this environment has in the development and self esteem of their children.

The hundreds of people who participated in our meeting reminded us of the tremendous strength and resilience of our community and confirmed the values that unite Latinos: devotion to family, hard work, strong faith and community solidarity. Above all we are reminded of the unyielding hope for a better future for their children. Over and over meeting participants told us that *nuestros niños son nuestro futuro*, our children are our future and we must do everything to protect and educate them. Latinos are committed to their families, their communities and to this country. They have their hands extended to reach out to the rest of America. The policy agenda we are presenting here "*An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective*" is a collective document to share with America what the Latino community needs and can offer in order to prosper and thrive. This is our way of saying: outsiders no more. This is our land, the sacred place where the umbilical cords of our children are buried. Our future is intertwined with the rest of the American family in the pursuit of freedom, happiness, fairness and equity for all. We look forward to continued and new partnerships and collaborations to make this vision a reality

Maricela García
Executive Director

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¹ American Community Survey 2006, provided by University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The American Agenda from a Latino Perspective reflects the voices, hopes and vision for a better future for Latinos and the Chicago metropolitan region. The analysis and recommendations come primarily from a series of community meetings that Latinos United convened in 2006–2007 with more than 600 civic leaders, religious organizations, businesses, elected officials, and community activists. This document also incorporates relevant recommendations from four recent reports that address Latino and immigrant issues: *The State of Latino Chicago* and *Forging the Tools for Unity* by the University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies; *A Shared Future* by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs; and *For the Benefit of All* by the New Americans Policy Council.

Latinos have a long history in the Chicago region. From the early 19th century to the present, large numbers of Latinos have been part of the social and economic fabric of the city. At 1.7 million, the Latino population in the region is the third largest in the United States. In addition, the economic contributions of Latinos in the region cannot be overlooked. Illinois ranked 5th highest in Latino buying power at \$34.8 billion in 2006 and in the metropolitan Chicago region, Latinos have a combined household income of more than \$20 billion.

The hundreds of people who participated in our meetings reminded us, through their personal stories, of the tremendous strength and resilience of the Latino community and confirmed the values that unite Latinos: devotion to family, hard work, strong faith, and community solidarity. The challenges discussed in this report are presented as specific to the Latino community; however, the policy and program directions proposed in seven areas are universal and can make a difference for all Americans: education, immigration, housing, health and social services, workforce and economic development, community safety, and leadership development and civic participation. Our hope is that this *American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* serves as an advocacy tool for Latinos and as an invitation to other communities to pursue together opportunity, equity, and prosperity for all.

Education

Latino students must have access to an educational system that not only prepares them to be economically productive members of society, but also prepares them for a lifetime of civic participation. Today, 90% of Latino children in the Chicago metro region were born in the U.S. and they will be among our future teachers, engineers, and leaders. Their bilingual and bicultural skills will be critical to Chicago's workforce — locally, nationally, and internationally — and they must be adequately prepared by our school systems to compete in the local and global labor market. Yet, Latino students face obstacles in obtaining quality early and primary education, and the patterns of underachievement rooted in the lack of early childhood education follow Latino students into and beyond high school. Regionally, only 53% of Latinos who enter high school graduate four years later. In addition, only 31% of Latino students who graduate from high school will complete college within six years.

Education was overwhelmingly the greatest concern of Latino participants in our regional conversations. They expressed deep frustration about the failure of Chicago Public Schools and, increasingly, suburban districts to educate many Latino children, as demonstrated by high school dropout rates, low academic performance, and the low number of Latino students who are prepared for and enroll in college. The major barriers identified during the meetings were lack of facilities for preschool

programs, overcrowded and under resourced schools, and teachers and administrators that lack understanding and skills to effectively motivate and teach Latino students and engage their parents. They also emphasized the need for culturally relevant curriculum, scholarships, mentoring, and parent involvement in the college application process.

Highlighted Recommendations

- State legislators should make Preschool For All, Head Start and other quality early childhood education programs more accessible to Latino children by allocating capital funds to build facilities in underserved Latino neighborhoods and by allocating resources to provide affordable full day programs to parents who are employed with non-traditional work schedules.
- The state should allocate funds to create cohorts and provide scholarships to expand the pool of trained and qualified bilingual/bicultural teachers and administrators for early childhood education, elementary, and high school. Within this, it is necessary that foundations, businesses, and schools create a Latino Future Educators Fund to encourage Latinos to become bilingual/bicultural teachers and principals through targeted scholarships and other financial and academic support.
- Educational institutions need to conduct appropriate and vigorous outreach activities to ensure parent and community participation in leadership roles within city and suburban schools to improve educational outcomes for Latino students.
- Schools should have an articulated plan of action to mentor and support Latino students to graduate from high school and pursue higher education. As part of this effort, high school counselors should coordinate with university and college representatives to disseminate more widely information among Latino parents about the importance of college education and support them throughout the application process.
- School districts should partner with regional universities to develop culturally relevant, bilingual training programs for future teachers and develop continuing education programs for existing teachers to make education more relevant to Latino students as a means of increasing academic success and retention.

Immigration

Nearly 70% of Latinos are U.S. citizens and 90% of Latino children are born in the U.S., yet the general perception in American society is that most Latinos are immigrants and most immigrants are undocumented. The controversy around the immigration debate has become the biggest obstacle to discuss a broader Latino policy agenda. A new generation of comprehensive immigration policies is needed to support family unity, meet the labor needs of the U.S. economy, and strengthen national security. Failed attempts in Congress to fix the immigration system have prompted some local governments to propose harsh anti-immigrant ordinances intended to limit access to housing, education, and services. Policies and programs to support the integration of immigrants into the social, economic, and political fabric of the U.S. are necessary at the federal, state and local levels.

Participants felt strongly that changes in immigration policy should support the incorporation of newcomers into U.S. society. Integration policies are essential to provide long-term stability for Latino families. Participants recommended that the U.S. Congress pass legislation to allow families the opportunity to stay together by creating a path for most undocumented immigrants to obtain legal permanent residence and creating a work visa program. Participants reported increasing anti-immigrant sentiments and discriminatory practices in their communities and recommended counteracting them by educating the American public about the contributions of immigrants and Latinos.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Businesses, community organizations, and religious institutions should take the lead in urging Congress to pass a new generation of immigration legislation that will repair the broken immigration system. These policies must allow current undocumented immigrants to access opportunities to obtain legal permanent residency, establish a work visa program to meet the needs of the economy, and shorten the waiting period to receive family immigration visas.
- Local governments and institutions need to provide information to immigrants about how local institutions work and the rules and regulations that govern community life in areas such as housing, health, and education to successfully integrate newcomers into their communities.
- Community colleges, community-based organizations and other stakeholders should expand opportunities for immigrants to learn English by providing classes at times and locations that are convenient and accessible. Employer-based programs and incentives also can make it easier for Latinos to take advantage of opportunities to learn English.

Housing

Latinos share the American Dream of becoming homeowners. But housing affordability, overcrowding, and predatory lending remain big obstacles for Latino families. More than half of Latino households in the Chicago region own their homes, yet they are still considerably below the 79 % rate for white households in the region. Considering that homeownership is the primary vehicle for wealth accumulation for many Latinos, the lack of affordable housing and the increase in foreclosure rates among Latinos threaten the economic stability of many Latino families. Latinos are suffering a disproportionate burden in default and foreclosure rates throughout the United States.

Participants were most concerned about affordable housing, overcrowding, housing discrimination, and the foreclosure crisis. They stressed the importance of government interventions such as set-asides in new affordable developments. Participants noted that many families are forced to double up to afford rent or a mortgage and also often open their homes to extended family members who might otherwise become homeless. They were concerned about current trends of selective code enforcement by local municipalities to reduce the number of family members allowed to live in a household—actions that seem to target Latinos. They were also concerned about the institutional response to the foreclosure crisis that has restricted the flexibility of borrowing, making it harder for Latinos to keep or purchase their homes.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Municipalities should address explicitly Latino housing needs in their housing action plan, especially the availability of workforce housing. In addition, other affordable housing initiatives to be advanced include: employer-assisted housing programs, set-aside housing programs, affordable housing trust funds, and the expansion of first-time homebuyer assistance programs.
- Housing design for new and existing homes should conform to the household characteristics of extended families. Municipalities should carefully reconsider occupancy codes and collaborate with independent entities that can monitor a city's fair housing practices.
- Municipalities should provide locally based community mediation services to allow residents to resolve conflicts with their neighbors. Municipalities also should develop a model occupancy ordinance and enforcement mechanisms that ensure fairness and address the economic, cultural, and life-cycle factors involved in overcrowding.
- Community-based organizations and financial institutions should partner to increase families' financial literacy regarding the benefits and challenges of homeownership, maximizing their investments, and preventing foreclosures and predatory lending practices.

Health and Social Services

Latinos are a generally healthy population despite being the racial/ethnic group least likely to have health insurance in the U.S. This paradox is partly due to protective cultural and behavioral factors brought by Latino immigrants from their native countries. Over time, however, these protective factors are diminished as immigrants adopt more American lifestyle habits. The health status of Latinos also is affected by socioeconomic and environmental factors leading to health disparities. The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration has found that compared to whites, minority communities have higher incidences of chronic diseases, higher mortality rates, and poorer health outcomes.

Participants noted that many suburban communities, and some city neighborhoods, lack the health and social services infrastructure to meet the needs of the Latino community. This is due to a lack of resources and not enough bilingual and bicultural service providers. They were particularly concerned about untreated depression, alcoholism and other mental illness; an increasing epidemic of diabetes, asthma and childhood obesity; the evolving needs of Latino elderly and those who care for them; and the lack of respite care and other services for Latinos with disabilities. Most of these health problems are preventable but will require resources for culturally competent health and social services and opportunities for healthier lifestyles.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Until federal policy provides health insurance for everyone, the state must implement programs and policies that ensure all residents of Illinois can access affordable and quality health insurance coverage as a matter of public health.
- Corporate, private, and hospital foundations should partner with high schools, local community colleges, universities, and health care institutions to develop programs that recruit and train bicultural and bilingual health professionals.

- Community-based organizations and mental health programs should increase the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate counseling programs to address depression and other mental health issues that impact many Latinos, particularly immigrants, due to separation from family, social alienation, and difficulties adjusting to their new communities.
- Community-based organizations and community clinics should expand community education programs that increase health literacy, healthy behaviors, and access to appropriate health care services.

Workforce and Economic Development

Latinos are a major force in the economy of Illinois and indeed the entire country. Nearly 10% of the region's total household income and nearly 15% of the state's labor force was attributable to the Latino community in 2004. Illinois ranked 5th highest in Latino buying power at \$34.8 billion in 2006, and in the metropolitan Chicago region Latinos have a combined household income of more than \$20 billion. Latinos are responsible for approximately "40,000 Latino-owned businesses that generated more than \$7.5 billion in 2002 revenues." As companies face serious challenges in replacing a retiring workforce, the viability of our regional economy increasingly will be dependent upon a skilled Latino workforce. However, without a concerted effort for educational opportunities and workforce, Latinos will continue to be at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Participants emphasized that opportunities for well-paying employment and a good career ladder are critical to Latinos of all income levels, particularly for the incumbent workforce, if they are to access healthcare, attain homeownership, and afford a college education for their children. They expressed the need for a community-wide strategy to provide a variety of training and educational experiences, promoting continuous education and self-improvement including GED, English classes, and technology literacy to close the digital divide. Participants were concerned about workplace safety and stressed that workers need to be better informed about labor rights and laws.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Public and private funds should be increased to promote adult education programs that help Latinos earn their GED, attend English-language classes, and access information technology training that will provide a foundation for continued skill development and opportunities for upward mobility.
- Business, private foundations, government, labor and community-based organizations should increase funding and form partnerships to provide holistic job training that is inclusive of the incumbent workforce leading to opportunities for practical career ladders in projected growth economic sectors such as the service industry, education, health, transportation, skilled manufacturing, and transportation.
- State and professional accreditation organizations should establish a system for accreditation of skills acquired in other countries, to allow for an increase of qualified bilingual staff in industries currently struggling to meet a growing Latino population and build upon already acquired professional skills.
- Latino entrepreneurs should partner with private investors, banks, and government agencies to expand their businesses through venture capital and shared equity. At the same time, municipalities should support Latino entrepreneurship by offering technical assistance, and providing financial education.

Community Safety

Not only are Latinos, including youth, overrepresented in the criminal justice system, they also are treated more harshly than non-Latino whites, even when they are charged with the same types of offenses. According to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (2003), Latino youth were detained in Illinois at twice the rate of their white counterparts, and were committed to the Illinois Department of Corrections at a rate 45% greater than white youth. Targeted enforcement, mistreatment, language barriers, and biased decision-making erode community safety, trust, and relationships with law enforcement. Racial profiling by law enforcement has added implications for Latinos because it can result in deportation and separation of families.

Participants expressed a need to strengthen relationships with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system in order to address the root causes of crime and violence and decrease the overrepresentation of Latinos in both the adult and juvenile justice systems. They are concerned that public safety is jeopardized when Latinos fear harassment and abuse by the police and, therefore, become unlikely to seek police help, report crime, or otherwise cooperate with law enforcement. Many participants pointed out that the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment in their communities often results in discriminatory practices toward Latinos and that new policies that allow local police departments to enforce federal immigration laws will have a significant negative impact on Latino communities, inevitably resulting in higher levels of racial profiling, police misconduct, and other civil rights violations.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Bring together local leaders, community organizations, police, educators, and church leaders to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses community safety and community cohesion. With the ability to provide a vast array of culturally and linguistically competent services throughout Chicago, Latino community-based organizations and leaders are ready to build a partnership for public safety that leverages available resources to sustain and strengthen prevention, intervention, aftercare, and reintegration services.
- The number of culturally competent Latino and bilingual professionals in state and local criminal justice agencies should be increased. When the system is more "user-friendly," the goals of fairness and justice are more likely to be achieved. This can be done by recruiting, hiring, and training more attorneys, public defenders, and advocates who are Latino, or who speak Spanish and are culturally competent, to direct and conduct services for Latinos; and by ensuring that numbers of Latino employees at all levels closely reflect the numbers of Latinos served by criminal justice agencies, both public and private.
- Work more closely with community-based organizations for prevention, intervention, aftercare, and as alternatives to incarceration for low-level, non-violent offenders. Currently, the Latino community is severely under-utilized as the first best defense for preventing and addressing crime and violence when it occurs. The Latino community has a vested interest in reducing crime, since we are also many times the victim.
- School districts and community-based organizations should work together to ensure that there are after-school and recreational activities, and youth leadership development to keep children and adolescents involved and motivated to succeed. Such approaches provide alternatives to gang affiliation.

Leadership Development and Civic Participation

The Latino community must achieve sustainable, proportionate civic participation while broadening the social agenda for equality and opportunity for all Americans. To do this, Latinos must continue to develop strong leadership skills to advocate on their own behalf and participate in the decision-making processes that affect their quality of life. Despite low voter registration rates, those Latinos who are registered do vote in high numbers. The number of elected Latino officials in municipal, county, and state government has increased steadily in recent years due to coalition-building and changing demographics, and in 2003 Latino state legislators organized the first Latino Caucus in Illinois. Young Latinos must receive the mentoring and leadership training necessary to earn positions of power in community organizations and governmental institutions for the benefit of all communities.

Regional conversation participants emphasized that without more Latino leadership development opportunities and an increase in civic participation, local municipalities and state agencies most likely will continue to ignore the needs of this growing population. Greater participation by Latinos in key decision-making positions will enable Latinos to address critical issues such as education, jobs, affordable housing, and transportation, which are critical to the Latino community and to the region as a whole.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Chicago businesses, cultural institutions, universities, media outlets, philanthropic organizations and corporations should examine the make up of their boards and develop plans to incorporate Latino leaders to reflect better the demographics of the region.
- Latino organizations should step up their efforts to engage in voter registration, education, and mobilization to increase the participation of Latinos in the electoral process and to build the political power by identifying, training and supporting Latino candidates for local school councils, suburban school boards, planning and zoning boards, and higher public office that represent the interests of the Latino community.
- Municipal leaders should increase outreach efforts and work collaboratively with existing institutions to increase civic participation among foreign- and native-born Latinos and take a proactive, long-term approach to appointing them to various city boards and commissions.

Conclusion

The dreams of Latinos are the dreams of all Americans. Access to quality education and health care, well-paying employment, and political enfranchisement are expected by every American. The policy agenda we present here *An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* is a collective document to share with the Chicago region and the country about what the Latino community needs, and can do, in partnership with the rest of America, in order to prosper and thrive. This is our way of saying: outsiders no more. Our future is intertwined with the rest of the American family in the pursuit of freedom, happiness, fairness and equity for all. We look forward to continued and new partnerships and collaborations to make this vision a reality.

An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective

Latino Policy Forum

Introduction

Latinos have a long history in the Chicago region. From the early 19th century to the present, large numbers of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and recently South and Central American immigrants have been part of the economic and social fabric of the city. Like other migrants, they've come looking for work and other opportunities for their families, or seeking refuge from political turmoil. Decisions to migrate to Chicago have been pushed and pulled by the forces of global economics, violent political turmoil, U.S. immigration policy, and globalization. And decisions to stay have depended on the availability of educational, economic, social and cultural opportunities to achieve the American dream that Latinos have found in the Chicago region.

Today, the Latino population in the Chicago metropolitan region is the third largest in the United States. At 1.7 million, Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the region and account for one-fifth of the total population. Almost 80% of all Chicago-area Latinos are of Mexican descent and, perhaps surprisingly, more than half, 55%, live in the suburbs.² Much of this Latino population growth was experienced in the 1990s, when the annual rate of the 1970s and 1980s doubled.³

While immigration has been the principal factor in the expansion of the Latino community, in recent years this growth mostly has been due to U.S. births. Between 2004 and 2006, 72% of the increase of the Latino population was due to an increase in the number of Latino children born here.⁴ Latinos are a young population with high birth rates, and this trend is expected to continue.

Latinos are projected to become one-third of the total population in the Chicago region by 2030.⁵ The children of today's Latinos will be the workers, leaders and taxpayers of tomorrow. Investing in them and their parents is critical to ensuring Chicago's future as a prosperous metropolitan region.

The expansion of the Latino community has had an impact upon both the city and suburbs, in both positive and challenging ways. While local municipalities, many unfamiliar with Latino or immigrant communities, are challenged to meet their health, human services, and educational needs, Latinos' economic contributions cannot be overlooked: Latino entrepreneurs play an essential role in the economic and social development of many communities in the state of Illinois. Latino entrepreneurs contribute towards the stimulation of business growth and employment which in turn adds to the vitality of commercial centers and surrounding neighborhoods. Nationally, the buying power of Latinos is expected to reach over \$1.2 trillion by 2011.⁶ In Illinois, the approximately 40,000 Latino-owned businesses generated more than \$7.5 billion in revenues in 2002 and in the Chicago region the combined household

² American Community Survey 2006, provided by University of Notre Dame Institute for Latino Studies.

³ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.7.

⁴ Alejo & Puente, (2007).

⁵ Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (2005).

⁶ Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, The University of Georgia, June 2006.

income of Latinos was \$20 billion.⁷ Latinos account for 15% of the state's labor force and their bilingual and bicultural skills are valuable assets increasingly in this diverse business environment and global economy.

In addition to significant economic contributions, Latino core values of family unity, hard work, and community solidarity strengthen the society as a whole. Among Latinos, personal decisions about where to work, live, go to college, how to spend leisure time, and how to spend their earnings, are generally made within the context of family relationships and family unity.

From Numbers to Action

As Latinos have settled in the region, they have engaged in a variety of activities and social actions to improve the quality of their lives, creating opportunities for their community to live well while contributing to the economic and social vitality of our region: the Mexican Mutual Benefit Societies of the 1930s, the eruption of the 1966 Division Street Riots, recent pro-immigration marches, and the establishment of numerous Latino-led community organizations, policy institutions, and government offices.

Many Latinos have been a force in creating solutions to the social justice issues holding our community back such as the ineffective U.S. immigration system, limited political power, violence, health concerns, inadequate educational opportunities, concentration in low-wage jobs, and discrimination in housing and work. Over the years, Latinos have struggled together with other immigrants, people of color, and the working poor of all ethnicities to raise awareness and understanding about these issues among decision-makers. Latino leaders have partnered with non-Latino leaders to create solutions that support economic and social stability among parents and other wage earners in a family, giving children a better chance of obtaining an education and participating in activities that will prepare them to be productive adults. The challenges discussed in this report are presented as specific to the Latino community; however, the solutions are universal and can make a difference for Americans of all ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Latino Agenda being put forth in this document is in fact *An American agenda from a Latino Perspective*. It builds on the past efforts of Latino activism in Chicago and incorporates the proactive dialogue on immigrant integration that has taken place locally among Chicagoans of all backgrounds as a result of the national immigration debate. The policy and program directions proposed in this Latino Agenda were developed primarily by Latinos in collaboration with non-Latino leaders and policy makers. They encompass the thinking and strategizing of individuals convened by Latinos United, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the New Americans Policy Council, and the Institute for Latino Studies of the University of Notre Dame in separate efforts over the last three years.

This document is the culmination of a two-year process that included meetings across the Chicago metropolitan region with more than 600 Latinos representing various sectors including business, mutual aid societies and civic associations, social services, religious organizations, and elected officials. The first round of meetings in 2006 focused on identifying the issues that impact the quality of life of Latinos. We compiled this information and produced a policy document for further discussion. During the same period, other relevant reports were released by the Institute for Latino Studies of the University of Notre Dame, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and the New American Policy Council. We integrated the recommendations from these reports that were relevant for the development of a Latino policy agenda into our document. Subsequently, we convened a final round of community meetings to present and discuss the comprehensive policy document and to receive final comments and recommendations from the community. We believe that this inclusive community process created a document rooted in needs and aspirations of Latinos across the region. We heard the enormous challenges that the community faces, but we were also inspired by the strong sense of hope and determination that characterize Latinos.

The meetings usually went over time because of the interest of the participants to talk about issues and solutions to improve the quality of life of the community. We collected extensive information but, in the end, the most efficient means of representing the broad interests of the Latino community as expressed within the community meetings was to organize these interests into the following seven categories: education, immigration, housing, health and social services, workforce and economic development, community safety, and leadership development and civic participation. Education was identified at every meeting as the most important issue. It would have been possible to present a separate agenda on education because of the volume of information and recommendations that community members provided. It is clear that there are more issues that impact the quality of life of Latinos; however, the ones presented in this agenda surfaced as priorities during the community consultation process that Latinos United implemented. It was evident during these gatherings that Latinos are interested in policy matters and want to participate in advocacy activities to improve conditions in their communities and opportunities for their children.

We recognize that the realization of the American Dream and the full integration of the Latino community into mainstream American society will require partnerships and collaborative work on the part of Latino and non-Latino leaders, local and state policymakers, community institutions, and service providers. This will require the implementation of policies that mitigate disparities while ensuring access to resources and programs that support Latinos in their development. This also will take greater and deeper political participation by Latinos as elected officials, voters, and civic leaders in order to have an impact upon policy decisions that affect our community. Our hope is that this American Agenda from a Latino Perspective serves as a tool for Latinos and our partners to set priorities and generate the resources and will needed to make a difference for Latinos today, and for all residents of metropolitan Chicago in the future.

⁷ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.1.



Education

Context

Education long has been recognized as an important tool for both bringing about economic prosperity and ensuring greater participation in democratic institutions. An educated populace is an empowered populace, yet education does not simply mean learning math, spelling and science. Education also includes knowledge about one's environment, culture, democracy, economics, justice, and sociopolitical realities. Latino students must have access to an educational system that not only prepares them to be economically productive members of society, but also empowers them to uphold the fundamental values and principles of democracy and prepares them for a lifetime of civic participation.

The bilingual and bicultural skills of Latino children are a great asset for the region's competitive potential within the international economy. Latino will be among our future teachers, engineers, nurses, laborers, and leaders. Their earnings will be important to sustain local businesses, the municipal and state tax base as well as federal entitlement programs, and the ongoing viability of pension plans. Their bilingual, bicultural skills will be critical to Chicago's workforce — locally, nationally, and internationally — and they must be adequately prepared by our school system to compete in the local and global labor market. Today, 90% of Latino children in the Chicago metro region were born in the U.S.⁸ Considering that these children are U.S. citizens, more than ever the hopes and aspirations of Latino families and youth are those of every American: a life of opportunity, prosperity and dignity. The future prosperity of the Latino community and the Chicago metropolitan region undoubtedly will be measured by the ability of educational institutions to successfully prepare Latino children with the skills and knowledge necessary for the challenges of the 21st century.

**EDUCATION WAS
OVERWHELMINGLY
THE GREATEST CONCERN
OF LATINO PARTICIPANTS
IN OUR REGIONAL
CONVERSATIONS.**

Yet Latino students face obstacles in obtaining culturally relevant early and primary education, and the patterns of underachievement rooted in the lack of early childhood education follow Latino students into and beyond high school. There is extensive evidence that the differences in achievement between Latinos and whites, whether measured by standardized tests or school grades, have their foundations in the infant/toddler and preschooler period.⁹ These patterns of Latino underachievement are signifiers of an educational system that has failed to serve its population. Regionally, only 53% of Latinos who enter high school graduate four years later.¹⁰ In addition, only 31% of Latino students who graduate from high school will complete college within six years.¹¹ In the city of Chicago, more than 6,000 Latino preschool children are on waiting lists, largely due to the lack of space in public schools' pre-K programs.¹² We must give parents the appropriate tools to support learning at home and at school, to help them break these patterns, and contribute to the socioeconomic success of the region.

To construct a comprehensive educational strategy, we must analyze and address issues like the need for bicultural educators and school administrators to span the cultural gap between schools and Latino communities, the need to build new facilities while refurbishing existing ones, the importance of boosting high school graduation and college enrollment and retention rates, and the necessity of increasing parental involvement in the educational process. This analysis and strategy must take into account the economic, social, cultural, and language components of Latino communities and the schools that serve them.



⁸ American Community Survey 2006.

⁹ Miller, (2003).

¹⁰ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.3.

¹¹ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.58.

¹² Latinos United, (2007), p.5.

Community Feedback

Education was overwhelmingly the greatest concern of Latino participants in our regional conversations. Latinos believe that education is the stepping stone to upward mobility; without this opportunity, participants believed, the economic horizons of the community would be considerably more limited. Community members expressed deep frustration about the failure of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and, increasingly, suburban districts to educate Latino children, as measured by high school dropout rates, low academic performance, and the low number of Latino students who are prepared for and enroll in college. The major barriers to education identified during the meetings were lack of facilities for preschool programs, overcrowded and under resourced schools, and teachers and administrators that lack understanding and skills to effectively motivate and teach Latino students or engage their parents. Participants feared that some schools in the suburbs are increasingly following the same dysfunctional patterns such as high suspension rates among Latino students, low academic performance and lack of parent engagement. The value and hope that Latinos place in education and the poor academic outcomes for many Latino students are incongruent. Participants mentioned that to provide our children with opportunities, we must break the status quo in the educational system and create a Latino education initiative with clear goals and benchmarks.

Not only did participants cite education as their most important priority, but many other topics, such as health and civic participation, alluded to educational issues inside and outside of schools. In particular, the idea of properly teaching and celebrating Latino culture held a high priority. Participants stressed the need for bilingual and bicultural teachers in existing schools as well as the necessity to build and staff new schools in neighborhoods with growing Latino populations. Participants were particularly concerned about the lack of understanding among educators with regard to Latino youth and culture, and the resulting cultural schisms that occur between schools and community members. Parents were very concerned that not enough teachers from their communities worked in their children's schools. For students who do go on to college, the community stressed the need for scholarships, mentoring, and parent involvement in the overall process.

Participants at our regional conversations identified parental involvement as the cornerstone to academic success. Studies have shown that parent involvement is critical to a child's education, yet many Latino children have parents who did not attend school in the U.S. and may not have ever benefited from much formal education. This poses serious challenges as families try to balance education with other responsibilities. Parents who work long hours, do not speak English, or have low educational attainment to help their children with homework, leaving children to navigate their education without a parent advocate.

The issue of the retention of Latino culture and the difficulties associated with cultural differences between schools and communities was repeatedly voiced by participants. These schisms are at the root of many of the educational and civic challenges facing Latinos. The resulting differences and misunderstandings make learning an unnecessarily harsh and hostile process for children and parents. Latinos coming from low-income families do not see the relevance of traditional public education in which the curriculum is far removed from students' culture and daily experiences, and as a result many drop out. A culturally relevant educational strategy is needed as a means of reengaging Latino students, and ensuring future academic achievement for individuals and socioeconomic development for Latino communities.

Schools and community organizations must partner with research and teacher-training universities to develop culturally relevant teacher training programs geared towards addressing the educational needs of Latino children — and indeed children of all ethnicities — in the metropolitan Chicago area. Culturally relevant education is a highly successful pedagogical method that takes into account the ethnicity of students, their backgrounds, history, environment, sociopolitical realities, and cultural knowledge and language, while training teachers to conduct reflective research in their classrooms and communities as a means of constantly improving the educational experience of students. We all learn culturally; we all learn contextually; we all need to feel at home to learn; we all acquire new knowledge on the basis of our learned experiences and motivations.

Teachers receiving this form of training will have the skills and knowledge to teach diverse student populations and will know how to collaborate on a level field with parents and communities. A learning process intertwined with and based on community works and culturally relevant research projects helps students develop human and leadership skills necessary for professional and civic life. Increased communication among educators, parents and communities fosters parental involvement at school as it lessens the linguistic and cultural gap. The long-term gains of educating Latino students properly, including bilingualism and cultural sensitivity, will far outweigh any short-term economic costs. The Latino population is contributing most of the growth in the Chicago area; Latinos' contribution to the economy both as workers and consumers grows by the day; they are an integral part of the present and future of the region. Investing in their education is investing in its prosperity.

Participants in our forums suggested the following priorities aimed at improving the academic achievement and educational attainment of Latino children.

Recommendations

Early Childhood Education

- The government, churches, community organizations, and philanthropists, should redouble their efforts to help parents facilitate the healthy growth and development of their children in the first years.¹³
- State legislators should make Preschool For All, Head Start and other quality early childhood education programs more accessible to Latino children by allocating capital funds to build facilities in underserved Latino neighborhoods and by allocating resources to provide affordable full day programs to parents who are employed with non-traditional work schedules.¹⁴
- Early childhood education programs should develop strategies to increase participation of Latino parents in their children's education by addressing language and cultural barriers. These programs should understand and implement best practices to teach children of diverse cultural and language background and engage their families in the process.
- Spanish language media should undertake a public awareness campaign on the critical importance of early childhood education.

¹³ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.46.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.46.

Elementary and High School

- City and suburban schools need to review and improve, or replace, bilingual education programs to ensure that students achieve fluency in reading and writing in English, and expand dual language programs that develop second language capability for all students K-12.¹⁵
- The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and CPS need to increase the capacity of elementary schools in collaboration with the families and communities they serve to accelerate Latino children's learning and achievement, especially for English language learners and those from low income families.¹⁶
- CPS and suburban school districts should partner with businesses, private foundations, and community-based organizations to expand after-school enrichment programs. Foundations, ISBE and local school districts should provide funding for the community school model that keeps schools open in to the evening with educational programs and activities for community members of all ages.
- School districts should partner with Latino community-based organizations to develop Latino educational initiatives to increase performance and higher academic outcomes.

Parental Involvement

- Educational institutions need to conduct appropriate and vigorous outreach activities to ensure parent and community participation in leadership roles within city and suburban schools to improve educational outcomes for Latino students.¹⁷
- Hometown Associations, Spanish language media, and Latino-owned businesses should educate and facilitate the active participation of Latino parents in schools, including direct involvement in local school boards.

Capital Funding

- Policymakers should increase resources necessary to build preschool facilities, placing priority in underserved neighborhoods.
- Legislators need to establish progressive options for funding education in the State of Illinois that address the problems of overcrowding and lack of resources in many schools located in Latino neighborhoods.

College Access

- Latino leaders, foundations, businesspeople and educators should partner to expand programs, from middle school to high school, that support and motivate Latino students to finish high school, while preparing them to enroll in college by providing assistance in the financial aid and college application processes.
- Public and private colleges and universities in Illinois need to increase the recruitment, enrollment and retention of Latino students in colleges and other post-secondary programs. Latino organizations, businesses and foundations should fund and promote scholarships that include tuition, travel and incidentals.¹⁸

- Businesses, private foundations, and community-based organizations should increase efforts to leverage resources available for undocumented students, in the form of internships and scholarships to pursue higher education.
- Schools should have an articulated plan of action to mentor and support Latino students to graduate from high school and pursue higher education. As part of this effort, high school counselors should coordinate with university and college representatives to more widely disseminate information among Latino parents about the importance of college education and support them throughout the application process.
- ISBE and CPS must reach out to alternative schools and schools that cater to special education students so that they too are encouraged to graduate from high school and pursue higher education.
- Community-based organizations, high schools, and research institutions should develop partnerships to provide high school students with meaningful research opportunities to foster analytical and critical thinking skills needed to succeed in college.

Adult Education

- Community colleges and community-based organizations should provide GED and English as a Second Language classes in Latino neighborhoods that are convenient and accessible to working families. Community schools may also serve this purpose.

Workforce Development

- School districts can partner with regional universities to develop culturally relevant, bilingual training programs for future teachers and develop continuing education programs for existing teachers. Continuing education programs can focus on strategies to make education more relevant to Latino students as a means of increasing academic success and retention.
- University education and curriculum development programs can partner with social science and linguistics departments to research, refine and implement comprehensive teacher and administrative training programs in culturally relevant educational strategies and curriculum development.
- In partnership with educational institutions, ISBE needs to develop programs that streamline the accreditation of foreign-educated professionals, then transition them into culturally relevant continuing education programs. This will increase the pool of highly qualified bilingual teachers and personnel with expertise in working with Latinos and English language learners.
- The state should allocate funds to create cohorts and provide scholarships to expand the pool of trained and qualified bilingual/bicultural teachers and administrators for early childhood education, elementary, and high school. Within this, it is necessary that foundations, businesses and schools create a Latino Future Educators Fund¹⁹ to encourage Latinos to become bilingual/bicultural teachers and principals through targeted scholarships and other financial and academic support.

¹⁵ Doetsch, Muñana & Silva, (2006), p. 55.

¹⁶ Ready, & Brown-Gort, (2005), p. 46.

¹⁷ Doetsch, Muñana & Silva, (2006), p. 64.

¹⁸ Doetsch, Muñana & Silva, (2006), p. 65.

¹⁹ Doetsch, Muñana & Silva, (2006), p.57.

*Today
We March*

*Tomorrow
We Vote.*

Immigration

Context

The immigration debate has defined Latinos in the minds of the U.S. public, and the controversies swirling around it have become the single biggest obstacle to discuss a broader Latino policy agenda. Despite the demographic data indicating that more than 70% of Latinos are U.S. citizens and that 90%²⁰ of Latino children are U.S. citizens by birth, the general perception in society is that most Latinos are immigrants and most immigrants are undocumented. These perceptions have implications in the national policy debate. An anti-Latino sentiment is growing in our society fueled by the way the media portrays our community and by some politicians who scapegoat immigrants for political gain, using them as a wedge issue to gain votes.

On the policy level, the immigration debate is divided on two levels: federal policy on border control, which establishes how many people enter the country and for long; and state and local policies, which helps immigrants integrate and become part of the social and economic fabric of their new communities.

Unauthorized immigration is a problem for Latinos as well as for the rest of the country, and Latinos also want to see this issue resolved. A new generation of immigration policies is needed to support family unity, meet the labor needs of the U.S. economy, and strengthen national security. A comprehensive approach is necessary to fix our broken immigration system. The current system

REPORTS
INDICATE
THAT
HATE CRIMES
AGAINST LATINOS
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AND THAT
NATIVISM
IS ON THE RISE

forces many immigrant workers and employers to break the law if labor market needs are to be met. The immigration policies enacted in 1986 and 1996 closed most channels to enter or stay in the U.S. legally. As a result, 3.1 million U.S. children could lose their parents due to deportations.²¹ On top of this, hundreds of would-be immigrants die every year crossing the border²² and about 12 million immigrants live and work in the country without authorization.²³ The failed attempts in Congress to find a negotiated solution to fix the immigration system have prompted local governments to propose and pass harsh anti-immigrant ordinances that make it illegal to rent or do business with immigrants. In addition, reports indicate that hate crimes against Latinos have increased and that nativism is on the rise.²⁴

New immigration policies must consider the impact of globalization and U.S. foreign and domestic economic policies on migration patterns. U.S. free trade agreements with Latin America have unintentionally contributed to an increase of migration. While free trade agreements have been beneficial for some economic sectors, they have been devastating for others. Millions of small farmers in Mexico lost their livelihood as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); for example, small farmers could not compete with the cheap prices of subsidized corn from the U.S. that entered the Mexican market, and roughly 1.4 million small farmers went out of business during the four years after NAFTA was enacted.²⁵ Many likely crossed the U.S. border to find a job to feed their families. The availability of jobs in the U.S. and the willingness of employers to hire Mexican and other Latino immigrants provide strong incentives to cross the border without authorization. Immigration policies must reconcile the dichotomy in U.S. policies that promote an open border for investment, goods, products and services, but closes it for workers.



²⁰ American Community Survey 2006.

²¹ Passel, (2006), p. 8.

²² <http://www.freewmexican.com/news/49231.html>

²³ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20009&prog=zgp&proj=zusr>

²⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center. <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/intrep.jsp?iid=44>

²⁵ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20009&prog=zgp&proj=zusr>

Coherent policies to support the integration of immigrants into the social, economic and political fabric of the U.S. are necessary at the federal and state levels. Fairness must be restored for legal immigrants who lost access to basic federal programs in 1996 as a result of the provisions in Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. The State of Illinois must continue recognizing the contributions of immigrants and increase resources to ensure that immigrants learn English, become citizens, and have access to health care and quality education. Considering the high levels of employment among immigrants and the fact that they pay sales and income taxes like the rest of Americans, immigrants should be eligible for government-funded programs.

We must be able to craft an immigration policy that ensures the opportunity for all Americans to realize the American Dream. Temporary work visa programs to manage the legal entry of future workers must not undermine opportunities for domestic workers. Immigration policies must uphold workers' rights and human rights and be fair for all Americans.

Community Feedback

When discussing the issues that impact Latino families, participants naturally gravitated toward the challenges faced by immigrants. Although most Latinos are U.S.-born, immigration has a far-reaching impact in the Latino community because many households are of mixed status, including family members who are legal permanent residents, undocumented, and U.S. citizens. Participants said changes in immigration federal policies to facilitate the incorporation of newcomers into community life represent the most important step toward long-term stability for Latino families.

Some of the most recurrent points that participants made at the meetings were:

Successfully incorporating immigrants into their communities requires society to genuinely commit to providing the supports to facilitate learning English and civics, becoming citizens, acquiring skills, opening businesses, and becoming familiar and successfully interacting with the laws and institutions that govern our society.

**POLICYMAKERS
SHOULD INCREASE
RESOURCES
NECESSARY
TO BUILD
PRESCHOOL
FACILITIES,
PLACING
PRIORITY IN
UNDERSERVED
NEIGHBORHOODS.**

**3.1 MILLION
U.S. CHILDREN
COULD LOSE
THEIR PARENTS
DUE TO
DEPORTATIONS**

To counteract the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment in society, which often results in discriminatory practices toward Latinos independent of immigration status, we must educate and sensitize the American public about the contributions of immigrants. Immigrants are treated as “unwelcome guests,” and are not seen as constituents by law enforcement or public officials. As one participant put it, “They want and need our labor but do not want us to live in their neighborhoods.” This is evident in the effort that city councils of some municipalities have passed ordinances to make it illegal to rent housing to residents who cannot prove that they are in the country legally.

The U.S. Congress must pass immigration legislation to allow families the opportunity to stay together by creating a path for most undocumented immigrants to obtain legal permanent residence. When discussing how to secure the border, participants commented that the best strategy is to create a work visa program. Legalizing immigrants is urgent to stabilize families and communities. Some participants commented that communities with large numbers of immigrants feel as if they were under siege because of raids, police harassment, media attacks, hate crimes, landlord abuses, and overall contempt from institutions with which they interact.

Great concerns were expressed about the increasing efforts to deputize the local police to carry out immigration enforcement functions. Suburban residents predicted that as a result, immigrants and other Latinos will be less likely to report law violations and to collaborate with the police in preventing and solving crime. This undermines community safety.

The recommendations outlined below seek to address one of the most pressing policy questions of our time. Latinos are committed to finding solutions to fix the broken immigration system so that new legislation restores our tradition as a nation of immigrants and upholds America's greatest values of fairness, family unity, hard work and opportunity.

**A NEW
GENERATION OF
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TO SUPPORT
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MEET THE
LABOR NEEDS
OF THE U.S.
ECONOMY,
AND
STRENGTHEN
NATIONAL
SECURITY.**

Recommendations

- Businesses, community organizations, and religious institutions should take the lead in urging Congress to pass a new generation of immigration legislation that will repair the broken immigration system. These policies must allow current undocumented immigrants to access opportunities to obtain legal permanent residency, establish a work visa program to meet the needs of the economy, and shorten the waiting period to receive family immigration visas.
- Local governments and institutions need to provide information to immigrants about how local institutions work and the rules and regulations that govern community life in areas such as housing, health, and education to successfully integrate newcomers into their communities. Partnerships should be established among institutions in the suburbs to establishing Immigrant Welcoming Centers to support the integration of immigrants to their new communities.
- The media should counteract negative stereotypes about Latinos that affect community relations by promoting accurate portrayals, and communities should hold intercultural events that reflect the contributions of Latinos to the economic, social, and cultural development of the region.
- Local governments and health and social services institutions should establish language access policies that require municipal, social, and health services to be provided in Spanish.
- Municipalities should oppose deputizing their local police to carry out immigration enforcement functions in order to strengthen community-police relations and ensure community safety.
- Community colleges, nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders should expand opportunities for immigrants to learn English by providing classes at times and locations that are convenient and accessible. Employer-based programs and incentives also can make it easier for Latinos to take advantage of opportunities to learn English.

**NINETY PERCENT
OF LATINO CHILDREN
IN THE CHICAGO REGION
ARE U.S. CITIZENS
BY BIRTH**



Housing

Context

Homeownership often fosters a sense of permanency that can promote the integration of Latinos into their local communities. Homeownership is an integral part of the American Dream, and Latinos share that dream. They are increasingly becoming homebuyers, contributing strongly to the economy while investing in their new communities.

But, housing affordability, overcrowding, and predatory lending remain underlying problems for Latino families, despite the growing homeownership rates in the Latino community; more than half of Latino households in the Chicago region own their homes. In 2003, homeownership rates among Latinos were higher in the suburbs, at 64%, than in the city, at 44%.²⁶ Latinos accounted for 50% of the overall growth in owner-occupied homes in the Chicago metropolitan area.²⁷ Interestingly, home ownership rates for foreign-born Latinos are nearly the same as U.S.-born. Yet while Latino homeownership rates are increasing, they are still considerably below the 79% rate for white households in metropolitan Chicago.²⁸

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For the Latino community, homeownership is the primary vehicle for wealth accumulation. Consequently the lack of affordable housing in the city and suburbs has a significant impact on the community. A 2007 national report indicates that wages are not keeping pace with the high cost of housing, and a single minimum-wage earner will be unable to afford a two-bedroom apartment at today's rents anywhere in the country.²⁹ Gentrification in Chicago's Latino neighborhoods such as Pilsen and east Humboldt Park has forced large numbers of Latinos to move, and many have exited to the suburbs. Unfortunately, most suburban communities are not adequately prepared for large numbers of new arrivals, and while new homes are being built, the scale of new housing construction does not meet the needs of the growing Latino community.³⁰ The lack of affordable and available housing has led to a situation of considerable overcrowding in the region; between 1990 and 2000, the number of overcrowded housing units leapt by an average of 133%, 75% of which were occupied by Latinos.³¹



²⁶ University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies, analysis of 2000 Census and 2006 American Community Survey.

²⁷ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p. 37.

²⁸ University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies, analysis of 2000 Census and 2006 American Community Survey.

²⁹ Roth, (2007), p.14.

³⁰ Chicago Metropolis 2020 and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus released a report entitled Homes for a Changing Region which states the region needs approximately 185,000 new single-family, small-lot units, townhouses and apartments, yet current developer projections show that only about 24,000 such units are planned and that "excessive numbers of large-lot homes" are planned.

³¹ Roth, (2007), p.4.

Cultural factors also play a role in bringing about the overcrowded living conditions for many Latino families and communities. While strong family values are generally considered positive in American society, the desire and sometimes economic necessity of Latinos to live with extended family members is out of sync with the traditional American nuclear family lifestyle that is supported by the type of housing available in most communities. This lack of understanding and appreciation for the Latino focus on extended family households has contributed to a mismatch in housing for Latino families and potentially discriminatory housing practices.

An additional issue facing Latinos is the prevalence of predatory lending and the impact of the current subprime mortgage crisis on Latino communities. According to the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP), Latinos are suffering a disproportionate burden in default and foreclosure rates throughout the United States.³² NAHREP estimates that foreclosures on Latino-owned homes throughout the nation may reach an aggregate of \$24 billion this year. The New York Times reported that as of the end of 2006, 40% of Latino borrowers in the housing market received subprime loans, and of these borrowers a full 8% will be affected by foreclosures as compared to only 4% of white borrowers.³³ The personal and economic costs of the crisis will be high as families lose homes and savings and consequently their primary or sole source of wealth.

**40% OF LATINO
BORROWERS IN THE
HOUSING MARKET
RECEIVED
SUBPRIME LOANS,
AND OF THESE
BORROWERS A
FULL 8% WILL BE
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BY FORECLOSURES
AS COMPARED TO
4% OF WHITE
BORROWERS.**

**LATINOS ARE SUFFERING
A DISPROPORTIONATE
BURDEN IN DEFAULT AND
FORECLOSURE RATES
THROUGHOUT THE
UNITED STATES**

Community Feedback

Housing affordability was a major concern expressed during our community meetings. Participants communicated the need for government interventions such as ensuring set-asides in new affordable developments, increasing HUD outreach and promotion to the Latino community, and creating tax exemptions for affordable housing for low- to moderate-income homebuyers. Participants noted that stigmas exist regarding affordable housing and called for public education about affordable housing as a means of breaking down stereotypes. Furthermore, participants noted the need for affordable housing closer to jobs to reduce transportation costs and the need for cars.

Participants mentioned that housing overcrowding is connected to affordability and Latino cultural traits. The inability to pay the high cost of housing forces many to double up, and their sense of responsibility toward extended family encourages many to open their homes to those in financial crisis who would otherwise become homeless. Participants discussed current trends of selective code enforcement by local municipalities who are updating their occupancy standards to reduce the number of family members allowed to live in a household—actions that seem to target Latinos. In the report *Bajo el Mismo Techo*, one code inspector interviewed explained that only about half of all overcrowding complaints are valid.³⁴ In consideration of this, participants indicated that more efforts are needed to educate communities about housing ordinances and their effects on the extended family housing patterns preferred by Latinos.

³² Hispanic National Mortgage Association, www.hnma.com/news.html

³³ Nixon, (2006).

³⁴ Roth, (2007), p.19.

WHILE STRONG FAMILY VALUES ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED POSITIVE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY, THE DESIRE AND SOMETIMES ECONOMIC NECESSITY OF LATINOS TO LIVE WITH EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS IS OUT OF SYNC WITH THE TRADITIONAL AMERICAN NUCLEAR FAMILY LIFESTYLE THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THE TYPE OF HOUSING AVAILABLE IN MOST COMMUNITIES.

Latino organizations voiced concerns about the many Latino families affected by predatory lending and foreclosures. The institutional response to the crisis has been to restrict or eliminate the flexibility of borrowing. As a result, many existing Latino homeowners face the threat of foreclosure while potential Latino homebuyers are finding it harder to purchase homes. The personal and economic costs of the crisis will be high as some families lose homes and savings while others are denied the dream of homeownership.

The housing policies below seek to remove the barriers that put Latino families at risk of losing the benefits of homeownership.

Recommendations

- Municipalities should address explicitly Latino housing needs in their housing action plan, especially the availability of workforce housing. In addition, other affordable housing initiatives to be advanced include: employer-assisted housing programs, set-aside housing programs, affordable housing trust funds, and the expansion of first-time homebuyer assistance programs.
- Municipalities should partner with community-based organizations to promote outreach and education to the Latino community on housing ordinances prior to enforcement.
- Housing design for new and existing homes should conform to the household characteristics of extended families. Municipalities should reconsider carefully occupancy codes and collaborate with independent entities that can monitor a city's fair housing practices.
- The complaint process regarding overcrowded housing should not be anonymous. This way, municipalities can track patterns among complaints based on race and gender so that they can better determine when patterns discriminate against Latinos.
- Municipalities should provide locally based community mediation services to allow residents to resolve conflicts with their neighbors, using a language interpreter if needed. Municipalities also should develop a model occupancy ordinance and enforcement mechanisms that ensure fairness and address the economic, cultural, and life-cycle factors involved in overcrowding.
- Community-based organizations and financial institutions should partner to increase families' financial literacy regarding the benefits and challenges of homeownership, maximizing their investments, and preventing foreclosures and predatory lending practices.³⁵
- Financial institutions should be urged to continue accepting alternative forms of identification such as *matricula consular* and individual taxpayer identification to ensure that immigrants have equal access to the housing market.³⁶
- The state should enact legislation to curb predatory lending, prevent foreclosures, and ameliorate the impact these practices have on Latino families.

³⁵ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.47.

³⁶ Ibid.



Health and Social Services

Context

Latinos, and immigrants in particular, are a generally healthy population despite being the racial/ethnic group least likely to have health insurance in the U.S. This paradox may be partly explained by the youthful demographics of the population, but there are also protective cultural and behavioral factors such as healthier diets and more active lifestyles brought from their native countries that contribute to good health outcomes. Over time, these protective factors are diminished as immigrants adopt more mainstream American lifestyle habits and U.S.-born children and grandchildren of immigrants do not continue the positive health behaviors and values. If this pattern persists, the health status of Latinos is expected to drop, especially as the Latino population ages and a greater proportion of the population is U.S. born.

Many health issues of concern to the Latino community — and numerous health disparities — have been identified by national studies. The U.S. Health Resources and Services Adminis-

tration has found that compared to whites, minority communities have higher incidence of chronic diseases, higher mortality, and poorer health outcomes.³⁷ In Illinois, Latinos are far more likely than others to indicate that they consider their health to be only fair or poor.³⁸ Latinos are concentrated in low-wage job industries that are less likely to provide health insurance. Despite high rates of employment, Latinos have the lowest rates of insurance coverage in the country. Moreover, Latinos, whether insured or uninsured, have been found most likely to be disconnected from the health system and without a medical home.³⁹ Disparities in accessing affordable, culturally competent health care result in a lack of preventative and acute care and poorer health outcomes.

Socioeconomic and environmental factors such as occupations, economics, education, environment, migration patterns and immigration status, culture, and language all contribute to health disparities. Poverty in particular, plays a critical role. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states on its website that Latino children are more likely than non-Latino white children to live in poverty and “experience a disproportionate burden of infant mortality, low-birth weight, asthma, endocrine, neurological, and behavioral disorders which may be associated with exposure to hazardous substances.”⁴⁰ Low-income Latino adults are the least likely among all adults to have health insurance, whether private or public, leaving this population vulnerable to missed work time, undiagnosed medical conditions, and unhealthy living.⁴¹ Clearly, improving the socioeconomic status of Latinos through employment and education will be key to improving the health status of Latino families.

Latinos face significant barriers to obtaining health care coverage either through their employers, public programs or the purchase of private insurance. According to a 2005 study by the Commonwealth Fund, working age adult Latinos were the least



³⁷ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.84.

³⁸ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.31.

³⁹ Doty & Holmgren, (2005), p.2 .

⁴⁰ CDC website, Office of Minority Health.

⁴¹ Doty & Holmgren, (2005), p.2.

likely to be insured, with almost two-thirds of Latino adults — an estimated 15 million — uninsured at some point during the year. This high rate of uninsured among Latino adults is due, in part, to low rates of coverage in employer-sponsored and public insurance. Even though two-thirds of working age Latinos are employed either full or part time, only 34% had employer-sponsored coverage in 2005.

The situation is slightly better for Latino children. Nearly half of all Latino children were uninsured during all or part of the year, compared with one-third of U.S. children in low-income families.⁴² In Illinois, only 12% of foreign-born children are covered by Illinois Kid-Care, compared with 29% of U.S.-born Latino children and 45% of African American children.⁴³ Not surprisingly, foreign-born Latino children are the least likely of any group to have health insurance.

The consequences of being uninsured are many, including a lack of timely acute care and preventative health care, late diagnosis of disease and chronic conditions, untreated medical and mental health needs, and costly use of emergency rooms for non-emergency care. For example, while Latinos have a lower overall cancer rate than non-Latinos, they are more likely to die from the disease than their non-Latino counterparts due to late diagnosis and treatment.⁴⁴ Cancer is the leading cause of death among Latinas aged 25 to 64 and among Latino men 45 and older.⁴⁵

Heart disease, obesity, and diabetes are among the chronic conditions of concern to Latinos. The American Heart Association reports that heart disease and stroke account for almost 30% of deaths among Latino males and 35% of deaths among Latinas.⁴⁶ A 2002 report from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) stated that nearly 75% of the Mexican community was overweight and that another one-third was obese.⁴⁷ Children of Mexicans also have much higher rates of obesity than their non-Latino peers.

Culture and the environment must also be considered. The lack of green space and high rates of pollution in many Latino communities are barriers to the health of Latino individuals and families. According to the CDC, Latinos “face high rates of exposure to toxic substances, including the top four threats to human health: ambient air pollution, worker exposure to chemicals, indoor air pollution and drinking water.”⁴⁸ Latino communities and low-income neighborhoods have a pattern of less green space than non-Latino communities,⁴⁹ making it more difficult for Latinos to engage in physical activity. A 2005 article in the American Journal of Health Promotion showed that the degree to which city people walk or ride bicycles depends on how much green space is available.

In sum, a conjunction of institutional, social, cultural, language and behavioral barriers impede the Latino community from receiving the necessary health services needed. Considering that Latinos will constitute one third of the region’s population by 2030, addressing the challenges in health care for Latinos will prevent an overall decline in the state’s health and well being.

⁴² Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.86.

⁴³ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.30.

⁴⁴ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.89.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 89.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 89.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 90.

⁴⁸ CDC, Office of Minority Health website; <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Populations/HL/HHP/ATSDR.htm>

⁴⁹ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006). p.89.

Community Feedback

Participants in the regional conversations noted that many suburban communities with growing Latino populations lack the health and social services infrastructure to meet the needs of the Latino community. While services in the city are more plentiful, there is also a perception of unmet health needs among city Latinos. The following topics were of particular concern:

Participants discussed untreated depression, alcoholism and other mental illness in the Latino community. In many cases, depression seems to be the result of family separations and living in fear, especially among immigrants, unfamiliarity with legal procedures, and feeling stigmatized because of immigration status. Those battling mental illness need affordable, culturally competent mental health service providers including family counselors, therapists, and substance abuse treatment specialists. Participants encouraged Latino community-based organizations to bridge the gap and provide health and mental health services.

Participants expressed alarm at the increasing epidemic of diabetes, asthma, and childhood obesity related to poor nutrition and lack of exercise. These conditions directly affect the Latino community today and in the future. Participants saw a greater role for schools in promoting healthy lifestyles by providing healthier foods and increasing recess and gym time.

Caring for the Latino elderly has become an issue of significant interest. As the Latino elderly population grows, more families must make choices about caring for their elderly parents at home or moving them into senior homes. They are faced with a lack of support for home care and limited choices on housing that meets the needs of Latino senior citizens. Caring for the elderly is important to maintaining the strong Latino values of family and hard work among our youth and in our communities.

Some participants discussed the lack of respite care and other services for Latinos with disabilities. Many Latino parents caring for a child with disabilities, and Latinos with disabilities themselves, are not aware of the services and programs available to them — they lack easy access because of language, finances, cultural differences, or immigration status.

High pregnancy rates among Latina teens continue to be a concern. While many efforts have been made in schools and community institutions to reduce sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy, and numbers have dropped nationwide, they are still high. This must be addressed more aggressively to prevent pregnancies if Latinas are to develop their full potential in school and work.

Many meeting participants expressed the need for more green space and more recreational activities in Latino communities. These activities should be affordable and accessible to families at times that accommodate work and school schedules. Recreational and social activities provide a sense of community and opportunities for personal development among youth and adults.

To ensure that Latinos receive comprehensive medical examinations and correct diagnosis, health professionals must be linguistically and culturally competent. Participants expressed great concerns about the language and cultural barriers that many Latinos encounter when seeking health care services.

**LATINOS FACE
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WORKER EXPOSURE
TO CHEMICALS,
INDOOR
AIR POLLUTION
AND
DRINKING
WATER.**

Recommendations

- Until federal policy provides health insurance for everyone, the state must implement programs and policies that ensure all residents of Illinois can access affordable and quality health insurance coverage as a matter of public health.
- Local and state departments of public health, research universities, and foundations should continue to provide and expand resources for programs that promote preventative care and prevention education in the Latino community. This can happen in partnership with schools, churches, media, community-based organizations, community health promotion programs, and other grassroots initiatives.
- City and suburban governments need to ensure a minimum of parks and other green spaces in predominantly Latino communities to promote exercise, recreation, and overall well being.
- Corporate, private and hospital foundations should partner with high schools, local community colleges, universities, and health care institutions to develop programs that recruit and train bicultural and bilingual health professionals.⁵⁰
- School districts should increase their role as promoters of the health and well being of children and adolescents through health education programs, healthier cafeteria food, and an emphasis on physical education.
- Community-based organizations should increase programs that educate parents in bringing about the healthy growth and emotional development of their children.
- Regional organizations such as the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, local foundations, and local municipalities need to work with social services organizations to increase availability of health and social services in suburban communities with large Latino populations.⁵¹
- Community-based organizations and health institutions should increase the availability of drug, alcohol and substance abuse intervention and prevention programs for adults and youth that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.
- Community-based organizations and mental health programs should increase the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate counseling programs to address depression and other mental health issues that impact many Latinos, particularly immigrants, due to separation from family, social alienation, and difficulties adjusting to their new communities.
- Suburban and city social service organizations should partner with Latino community organizations to identify and address the needs of people caring for young and elderly relatives and those with disabilities.⁵²
- Community-based organizations and community clinics should expand community education programs that increase health literacy, healthy behaviors, and access to appropriate health care services.

⁵⁰ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p. 88.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 94.

⁵² Ibid. p. 94.



Workforce and Economic Development

Context

Latinos form a major force within the economy of Illinois and indeed the entire country. Nearly 10% of the region's total household income⁵³ and nearly 15% of the state's labor force was attributable to the Latino community in 2004.⁵⁴ However, while Latinos have very low levels of unemployment and Latino immigrants are more likely to have three or more workers per family household,⁵⁵ the low wages that characterize the Latino workforce experience — often well below established minimum wages — make it difficult to make ends meet. Without a concerted effort to increase the earning potential of Latinos, especially immigrants, Latinos will continue to be at the bottom of the economic ladder. To bring this about, Latinos must broaden the industries in which they work and gain a greater opportunity for upward mobility within these industries. Formal education, new job skills, and stronger English language skills are needed.

With the shift in the U.S. economy from manufacturing to the high-tech and service sectors, a more skilled and educated workforce will be required to maintain a competitive edge in the international market. Areas of job growth for the Chicago metropolitan region include health care, education, trucking and transportation, and skilled manufacturing. Bilingual and bicultural abilities are an advantage in these types of industries, and they can be target industries for Latinos.⁵⁶ Despite the shift away from manufacturing, this industry remains strong in the Chicago region and presents a unique job growth opportunity for Latinos. A 2005 report by Deloitte Consulting found that “the vast majority of American manufacturers are experiencing a serious shortage of qualified employees, which in turn is causing a significant impact to business and to the ability of the United States to compete in a global economy.”⁵⁷ The shortages are not merely in low-skilled jobs but, increasingly, within specialized occupations such as engineering and science. Latinos can play an important role in ensuring a competent and creative workforce is available to fill in these gaps. Therefore, we must develop policies that close the educational and skill gap so that Latino workers can advance from low-wage occupations to more advanced, upwardly mobile careers.

Latinos contribute toward the socioeconomic development and vitality of commercial centers in many neighborhoods and municipalities by stimulating business growth through entrepreneurship and the creation of new markets in food, restaurants, clothing and household commodities. For example, in Illinois approximately “40,000 Latino-owned businesses — many of which are owned



⁵³ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.10.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 25.

⁵⁵ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.25.

⁵⁶ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.35.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.34-35.

by Latino entrepreneurs, heavily staffed by immigrant workers, and patronized by immigrant customers — generated more than \$7.5 billion in 2002 revenues.”⁵⁸ Moreover, companies will face serious challenges in replacing a retiring workforce, making the viability of our regional economy increasingly dependent upon a skilled Latino workforce. Nationally, Latino employment has grown more than 16% since 2000 while overall U.S. employment barely has grown by 2%.⁵⁹

The tremendous buying power of Latinos is shaping retail and commercial markets across the country and drawing increased attention to the economic force of Latino communities. According to a 2006 Selig Center for Economic Growth report, nationally Latino purchasing power was \$798 billion in 2006 and expected to reach over \$1.2 trillion by 2011, representing more than 450% growth from 1990 to 2011. During that same period, growth of all consumer purchasing power is expected to have been 190%. The rapid growth in Latino buying power is attributed to immigration, a high birth rate, and the large number of young Latinos entering the workforce for the first time or advancing in their careers. The Selig Center ranks Illinois with the 5th highest Latino buying power at \$34.8 billion in 2006.⁶⁰ In the metropolitan Chicago region, Latinos have a combined household income of more than \$20 billion.

Professional Latinos, U.S.-born and immigrant, have valuable skills that can give the region a competitive edge in the global economy, especially with regard to trade and collaboration with Spanish-speaking nations. Considering that Spanish-speaking countries make up a \$2.4 trillion market, Latinos’ bilingual and bicultural capabilities present valuable opportunities for business and cultural exchange.⁶¹ The accreditation of immigrants with specialized education and skills must be streamlined in order to take advantage of the growing pool of skilled workers and professionals who have emigrated to the region and can fill labor gaps. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, estimates that by 2012, the U.S. could be short at least 1 million nurses, and currently Illinois has a nursing shortage of 7% (vacancies v. jobs filled).⁶² Immigrant nurses, teachers, accountants and other professionals come with a multitude of skills and expertise that should be used more fully for the benefit of the regional economy.

Latino males are employed primarily within occupations such as manufacturing, food service, construction and home maintenance, while Latinas are employed primarily within light manufacturing, hospitality, food service and retail.⁶³ Many of these employment opportunities are increasingly located in Chicago’s suburbs. Only one of the 10 largest job growth industries has a significant Latino worker presence — accommodations and food service — and the remaining nine typically require technical training or postsecondary education credentials that the Latino community lacks. However, Latinos are making inroads into higher-paying managerial and professional positions, making these the fastest-growing job growth categories for our community.⁶⁵

Language deficits also affect the ability of many Latinos to find wages that move them beyond working poor. The average fluent English-speaking immigrant earns nearly double that of a non-English speaking worker.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the industries with the highest growth projections are within the health, education, professional, technical, and scientific service industries and will require higher levels of education to be adequately staffed.

**DESPITE HIGH RATES
OF EMPLOYMENT,
LATINOS HAVE
THE LOWEST RATES
OF INSURANCE COVERAGE
IN THE COUNTRY**

Community Feedback

Workforce development for all segments of the Latino community was a major concern expressed by participants in the community meetings. They said information about and opportunities for well-paying employment and a good career ladder in today’s job market are critical to Latinos if they are to access healthcare, attain homeownership, and afford a college education for their children. Participants expressed the need for a community-wide strategy to provide educational opportunities at all levels, promoting the concept of continuous education and self-improvement.

Participants said that in addition to the English classes offered by community-based organizations, employers and companies should be encouraged to take advantage of existing programs designed to teach English in the workplace. Participants also recognized the need to provide Spanish literacy programs in the community to prepare Latinos with low-literacy skills to then participate in English-language programs.

For Latinos with low educational attainment, particularly immigrants, participants felt that attaining a GED was the first step toward a practical career. As finding employment can be quite difficult for non-English speakers, participants mentioned the need for job centers staffed by Spanish-speaking Latinos who can assist job seekers, provide information about opportunities to work from home, and assist immigrant professionals in finding work in their professions and job-shadowing opportunities.

Another issue of concern raised by the participants was workplace safety — the need for workers to be informed about labor rights and laws, particularly as they apply to the undocumented. In addition to having fewer job opportunities and being more likely to work in low paying industries, immigrant workers remain at far greater risk of being killed or injured on the job than native-born workers.⁶⁷

Participants noted that the promotion of small business development and dissemination of market-related information are critical for entrepreneurship in the Latino community. Moreover, they stressed the need to recruit more Latino professionals to business, corporate and civic boards, as well as to initiate and support efforts to create more Latino-led community development financial institutions to provide greater access to capital for economic development and business opportunities.

The policies set forth by the participants of our regional conversations focused on resources and innovative programming that will increase the opportunities for Latinos to acquire the necessary language skills and training to ensure long-term professional development.

⁵⁸ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.32.

⁵⁹ HispanTelligence®. <http://www.hispanicbusiness.com>

⁶⁰ Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, The University of Georgia, June 2006.

⁶¹ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.11.

⁶² Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, (2006), p.15.

⁶³ Ready & Brown-Gort, (2005), p.32.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.43.

⁶⁵ HispanTelligence®. <http://www.hispanicbusiness.com>

⁶⁶ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.11.

⁶⁷ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p.36.

PARALLEL TO
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AND OUR
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Recommendations

- Public and private funds should be increased to promote adult education programs that help Latinos earn their GED, attend English-language classes, and access information technology training that will provide a foundation for continued skill development and opportunities for upward mobility.
- Community colleges, trade schools and community-based organizations should assist low-skilled immigrants to create a practical career ladder by tying English instruction and vocational training to advancement within specific industries such as restaurants, hotels, tourism, and health care.⁶⁸
- Business, private foundations, government, labor and community-based organizations should increase funding and form partnerships to provide holistic job training that is inclusive of the incumbent workforce leading to opportunities for practical career ladders in projected growth economic sectors such as the service industry, education, health, transportation, skilled manufacturing, and transportation.
- Financial institutions, employers, schools, and community-based organizations need to expand existing efforts to increase financial literacy through bilingual programs.⁶⁹
- Organized labor should partner with Latino community leaders and potential employers to increase access to meaningful job training and opportunities for Latino workers in the building trades and related areas.
- Trade organizations, professional associations, and unions must increase Latino membership to allow them to expand their professional networks and increase opportunities for continued professional development.
- State and professional accreditation organizations should establish a system for accreditation of skills acquired in other countries, to allow for an increase of qualified bilingual staff in industries currently struggling to meet a growing Latino population and build upon already acquired professional skills.
- Latino entrepreneurs should partner with private investors, banks and government agencies to expand their businesses through venture capital and shared equity. At the same time, municipalities should support Latino entrepreneurship by offering technical assistance and providing financial education.⁷⁰
- Latino business owners should expand their networking and skill building opportunities by participating in local chambers of commerce, community development corporations, labor organizations and other networks, and these groups should reach out to Latino business owners.⁷¹
- Latino professional organizations should partner with retired professionals and other leaders in the corporate, medical, legal, and technical professions to create networking and mentoring opportunities that foster advancement of Latinos into upper management positions and boards.⁷²

⁶⁸ Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, (2005), p.17.

⁶⁹ Doetsch, Muñana & Silva, (2006), p. 47.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 44.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 44.

⁷² Ibid, p. 40.



Community Safety

Context

The Latino community is concerned about crime and punishment, and the effects it has on Latino families. The systematic response of the justice system for the past 20 years has been a “lock-em up and through away the key” strategy which has resulted in more than 6 million people nation-wide being part of the criminal justice system. To date, more than 2.2 million people are sitting behind bars. Additionally, one in every six Latino men will be incarcerated in his lifetime. Not only are Latinos overrepresented in the criminal justice system, they are also treated more harshly than non-Hispanic whites, even when they are charged with the same types of offenses. Targeted enforcement, mistreatment, language barriers, and biased decision making erodes community safety, trust, and relationships with law enforcement.

Both Latinos and African Americans in Illinois have been victims of racial profiling by law enforcement. However, racial profiling has additional serious implications when discrimination by law enforcement could potentially result in the deportation and separation of families.

In addition, limited resources for Latino community-based organizations to provide culturally and linguistically competent services for crime prevention, intervention, and reentry contributes to the stress of the community, and the nation as a whole. Research demonstrates that such services are less expensive and more effective at addressing the root causes of crime and protecting community safety rather than relying on incarceration alone.

Similar to the adult system, Latino youth are disproportionately overrepresented in the juvenile justice system and experience harsher treatment, tougher sentences, and are more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts. This unjust treatment creates a grim and devastating reality: broken youth, families, and communities.

According to the most recent data available from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (2003), Latino youth were detained in Illinois at twice the rate of their white counterparts. In addition, Latino youth were committed to the Illinois Department of Corrections at a rate 45% greater than white youth, and were five times more likely than their white counterparts to be locked up for public order offenses, like loitering and graffiti, in state facilities.⁷³

Incarceration as a one-size fits all approach provides a false sense of public safety, destabilizes communities, and further fuels the criminalization of poor communities of color by the justice system. Latino community-based services such as drug, alcohol, and mental health treatment programs can create safer communities and save taxpayer dollars given to their ability to address, deter, and prevent youth crime.

**“NUESTROS NIÑOS
SON NUESTRO FUTURO,
OUR CHILDREN ARE
OUR FUTURE AND
WE MUST DO EVERYTHING
TO PROTECT AND
EDUCATE THEM”**



⁷³ Ziedenberg, (2006), p. 21-22.

Community Feedback

Overrepresentation for Latino youth and adults in the justice system is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive solution in which Latino communities and leaders are ready to engage. This strategy will first require truth in reporting regarding the race and ethnicity data collection at every stage of the justice system. To date, the closest “relatively good” data available from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is from 2003. Identifying the decision points at which disproportionality exists will allow for planning strategic system responses that get at the root cause of the problem and reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

Given demographic shifts showing that Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority population in the country, and given the fact that fairness, equality, and due process are the intended hallmarks of the U.S. criminal justice system, such findings constitute a travesty of injustice. Overrepresentation and harsh treatment of Latinos in the criminal justice system require immediate redress. Justice demands no less.

In terms of crime prevention, participants expressed a need to strengthen relationships with the juvenile justice system to address the root causes of crime and violence while reducing the overrepresentation of Latinos in both the adult criminal and juvenile justice system.

The Latino community is significantly affected by racial profiling because it is not only targeted by local and state law enforcement agencies, but also by federal agencies including the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (BCBP). Joint operations between local/state and federal law enforcement agencies are becoming a routine method of law enforcement overstepping the bounds of the Constitution in the name of immigration and drug enforcement. The use of racial profiling tactics not only violates civil rights, but also undermines the ability of law enforcement to effectively enforce the law. Specifically, when an individual’s ethnicity is used to select which individual to subject to routine or spontaneous investigatory activities, then that individual — along with family members, friends, and neighbors — loses trust in the integrity of law enforcement. As a result, public safety is placed in jeopardy because members of these communities fear harassment and abuse by the police and therefore are

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unlikely to seek police help when they legitimately need it: reporting crime, serving as a witness or on a jury, or otherwise cooperating with law enforcement in an investigation.

Many participants pointed out that the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment in their communities often results in discriminatory practices toward Latinos independent of their immigration status. While the safety and security of our communities and the country are of the utmost importance, new policies that would allow local police departments to enforce federal immigration laws will hinder other criminal investigations and have a significant negative impact on Latino communities. Immigrant advocates, legal experts, and many law enforcement agencies agree that any policy shift regarding the use of state and local police in the enforcement of immigration laws is in direct conflict with long-standing legal tradition; will inevitably result in higher levels of racial profiling, police misconduct, and other civil rights violations; and will destroy the trust between police and immigrant communities, ultimately undermining effective law enforcement.

Every year there are 600,000 adults and 100,000 youth reentering society after being incarcerated. Approximately one-third of them are Latinos. Studies from the Department of Justice show that more than 2/3 released prisoners will be rearrested for a felony or a serious misdemeanor within 3 years after their release. Successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals benefits the community and individual in ways that go beyond a dollar measurement. The social value of reintegration is measured by a formerly incarcerated person’s ability to contribute to the support of his or her family, provide a healthy environment for his or her children, and enhance the positive human resources in the community.

A strong reintegration process—through which incarcerated people are prepared for release, leave prison, return to communities, and adjust to free living—is needed to protect the public effectively.

Many men, women, and youth leave prison and jail with substance abuse disorders, chronic health issues, low-levels of education and job training, and a general lack of resources to help them truly reintegrate. Yet, research confirms that these services — including education, job training, job placement, job retention, and alcohol and drug treatment — are essential to help formerly incarcerated individuals obtain work, housing, and avoid recidivism.

Community safety issues are encompassed by the vast majority of other issues within this policy paper. The policy directions outlined below seek to eliminate the most critical barriers that prevent Latino families from securing the kind of safety and stability that will allow them to achieve a quality of life that fosters long-term success.

Recommendations

- Bring together local leaders, community organizations, police, educators and church leaders to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses community safety and community cohesion. With the ability to provide a vast array of culturally and linguistically competent services throughout the Chicago region, Latino community-based organizations and leaders are ready to build a partnership for public safety that leverages available resources to sustain and strengthen prevention, intervention, aftercare, and reintegration services.
 - The 2004 racial profiling law focused on data collection in Illinois needs to be reinforced. A ban needs to be established, and sanctions for those who violate this ban should be enforced. Law enforcement agencies should be required to document all law enforcement contacts by race and ethnicity, including contacts not resulting in arrest, in order to monitor whether — and, if so, when — law enforcement practices and procedures result in racial and ethnic disparities.
 - The State, in partnership with research institutions, must carefully analyze the points in the justice system where disparities occur, such as during arrest, detention, waiver to adult court, and confinement. It is necessary to look closer at the practices, policies, and programs that enable disparities to exist and commit ourselves to partnership for reform.
 - Alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders, including low-level drug offenders and youth offenders, should be designed, implemented, adequately funded, and regularly assessed by law enforcement and community-based organizations. These approaches should increase public safety, reduce the prison population, control and decrease prison costs, and create greater opportunities for communities to thrive.
 - Systematic, uniform data collection procedures to determine the proportion of Latinos being processed at each stage of interaction with the justice system in each county across Illinois should be established by the State. Without consistently applied, sound data collection methods, we cannot trust that racial and ethnic profiles of the U.S. prison population are accurate, nor can we track and address disparities based on profiles or know whether we are providing adequate services for Latinos.
- Municipalities and police departments should start with dialogue and understanding, not just stricter enforcement of regulations
 - Philanthropic and business communities must ensure that Latino community-based organizations are not left out of the funding streams. Many Latino community-based organizations are in the heart of communities where crime and violence occurs. Increased funding to provide culturally and linguistically competent programs for crime prevention, intervention, aftercare, and reentry will ensure decreased crime rates and build stronger communities.
 - The number of culturally competent Latino and bilingual professionals in state and local criminal justice agencies should be increased. When the system is more “user-friendly,” the goals of fairness and justice are more likely to be achieved. This can be done by recruiting, hiring, and training more attorneys, public defenders, and advocates who are Latino, or who speak Spanish and are culturally competent, to direct and conduct services for Latinos; and by ensuring that numbers of Latino employees at all levels closely reflect the numbers of Latinos served by criminal justice agencies, both public and private.
 - Work with community leaders and national Latino organizations to develop and implement a training program in cultural competence aimed at increasing participants’ understanding of the unique issues and challenges confronting Latinos within their respective jurisdictions.
 - Secure additional funding to ensure that law enforcement, justice system, education, and mental health professionals are adequately trained in Spanish language and in cultural competence regarding specific Latino ethnic groups.
 - Law enforcement and community-based organizations must work together to establish community workshops that explain victim and offender rights and protection laws, promote neighborhood watches, and conflict resolution training for youth and adults.
 - Work more closely with community-based organizations for prevention, intervention, aftercare, and as alternatives to incarceration for low-level, non-violent offenders. Currently, the Latino community is severely under-utilized as the first best defense for preventing and addressing crime and violence when it occurs. The Latino community has a vested interest in reducing crime, given that we are also many times the victim.
 - School districts and community-based organizations should work together to ensure that there are after-school and recreational activities, and youth leadership development to keep children and adolescents involved and motivated to succeed. Such approaches provide alternatives to gang affiliation.

**IMMIGRANT
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NATIVE-BORN
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**THE POLITICAL AND CIVIC
PARTICIPATION OF THE
LATINO COMMUNITY HAS
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OFFICIALS**



Leadership Development and Civic Participation

Context

Given current and projected population growth, the Latino community must achieve sustainable, proportionate civic participation while broadening the social agenda for equality and opportunity for all Americans. To do this Latinos must continue to develop strong leadership skills to advocate on their own behalf and participate in the decision-making processes that affect their quality of life.

Latinos are already 20% of the population and are expected to be 33% by 2030. Now is the time to identify, train and promote Latinos in key policy-making positions. Leadership development programs that include training in facilitating decision-making, bringing about conflict resolution, and working with people of various backgrounds are all valuable skills needed for leadership. But, programs also should build upon the existing strengths of Latino cultural and social values to offer unique approaches to solving community issues. Most importantly of all, Latinos must vote.

Despite low voter registration rates, those Latinos who are registered tend to turn out in high numbers. In 2004 almost 86% of all Latino registered voters did in fact vote, up from 83% in the November 2000 election.⁷⁴ When Latinos vote they tend to focus their civic efforts on issues such as affordable housing, access to better jobs, and equitable schools. Legal permanent residents represent a massive voting potential among Latinos, however, they must become U.S. citizens first, and citizenship has become more difficult and expensive to obtain. Increasingly complex paperwork, increased difficulty of citizenship tests, and a rise in naturalization application fees.⁷⁵

One threat to Latino civic participation is the increasing action of hate groups. Studies by the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center have shown that hate crimes against Latinos are on the rise, and that the number of hate groups has risen 30% since 2000.⁷⁶ Twenty-three such hate groups exist within Illinois, 19 of them centered within the metropolitan Chicago region.⁷⁷ To counter the effects of these groups, Latinos and justice-minded civic organizations must band together and work toward creating a more pluralistic society that better reflects the true diversity of the United States.

Despite these impediments — and as a testament to the spiritual and cultural strength of the community — Latinos are increasingly taking action in the political arena, be it in the voting booth or on the streets. In 2003, Latino legislators organized the first Latino Caucus in Illinois, and the number of elected Latino officials in municipal, county and state government has increased steadily in recent years due to coalition-building and changing demographics. The political and civic participation of the Latino community has not only increased the number of Latino elected officials, but Latinos are also organizing locally to form support groups in both the United States and countries of origin.

One example of this has been the growth of Hometown Associations (HTAs) which are based on social networks maintained by immigrants who have come to the United States from the same town or village, most often in Mexico though HTAs formed by Guatemalans, Dominicans, and Salvadorans are increasing. These



⁷⁴ Doetsch, Muñana, & Silva, (2006), p. 74.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.76-77.

⁷⁶ Southern Poverty Law Center. <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=886>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

groups seek to promote the well-being of their hometown communities of both origin and residence (in the U.S.) by raising money to fund public works and social projects.⁷⁸ Aside from supporting the social and economic development of communities in Chicago and abroad, HTAs are increasingly becoming involved in politics while forming alliances with other organizations.

Through a variety of organizations and actions, Latinos are increasingly forging a space for themselves as an integral part of the Chicago — and indeed, national — culture. As Latinos participate in a variety of civic actions, they are able to represent their cultures in the public arena, learning from other groups while also spreading knowledge about themselves. Through this process, Latinos are integrated into the Chicago social scene while contributing to the development and enrichment of the region's culture. It is imperative that this momentum be maintained and broadened. Community-based leadership programs and grassroots organizing projects offer leadership development at the community level and make important contributions to Latino cultural, political, and social life. Perhaps most importantly, it is of the utmost urgency that young Latinos receive the mentoring and leadership training necessary to earn positions of power within community organizations and governmental institutions. This is urgent not only for individual success, but perhaps more importantly as a means of ensuring that the full potential, wisdom and strength of the Latino community is reflected in the policies and institutions that affect the lives of us and our children.

Community Feedback

Regional conversation participants consistently cited the need for more leadership development among Latino communities. Without leadership development that leads to civic participation, local municipalities and state agencies risk ignoring the needs of this growing population. Greater participation by Latinos in key decision-

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**THE SELIG CENTER
RANKS ILLINOIS
WITH THE 5TH
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LATINO BUYING
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\$34.8 BILLION
IN 2006**

making positions would allow Latinos to address critical issues such as education, jobs, affordable housing, and transportation. These issues are not only critical to the Latino community but to the region as a whole.

Many of the concerns voiced by participants regarding civic participation and leadership development within the Latino community centered on educational opportunities for youth and adults. Participants stressed the need for educational strategies and programs for youth and adults geared towards increasing the amount of Latino professionals — specifically within schools — as a critical component of fostering Latino leadership and greater civic participation. This would include increased civic education and in-school leadership development programs that include mentorship opportunities.

Participants showed concern that Latino causes were not proportionately represented in government institutions. They stressed the need to elect Latino officials who will demonstrate transparency and accountability and who will fight strongly for Latino interests. In light of redistricting beginning in 2010, participants said immediate action is necessary for Latinos to be represented accurately in future political processes. Participants suggested that community political forums that inform the public should be organized to mobilize and inform Latino voters. The regional discussions showed that Latinos are enthusiastic about civic and political participation, but there is an urgent need for education and language-relevant information on how to engage fully in the process.

The historic marches that took place throughout 2005 demonstrate that leadership development and civic participation efforts need not be limited to Latinos who are U.S. citizens or to those who are 18-years or older. Political education and leadership development are important for all members of the Latino community, regardless of their citizenship status or age. However, their levels of participation must grow into leadership roles within civic organizations and all levels of government.

The priorities set forth below begin to address the necessary changes in leadership development that will ensure Latinos have a role in shaping their future.

⁷⁸ http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/thesixthsection/special_mexican.html

Recommendations

- Spanish and English radio, television, and print media need to expand programming that educates and informs the Latino community about issues such as financial literacy, voting, education, and jobs, and to produce programming that demonstrates ways in which Latinos contribute to the social and economic development of the Chicago metropolitan region.
- Latino and non-Latino cultural institutions need to partner to promote cross-cultural learning.
- Chicago businesses, cultural institutions, universities, media outlets, philanthropic organizations and corporations should examine the make up of their boards and develop plans to incorporate Latino leaders to reflect better the demographics of the region.
- The Latino community should partner with the Chicago business community and philanthropic institutions to build the capacity of organizations that work with immigrants through mentoring, relationship-building, funding and leadership development.
- Corporations and philanthropic organizations should develop initiatives to strengthen the capacity of emerging Latino organizations so that they can effectively serve the needs of their communities.
- Community-based organizations, businesses and philanthropic institutions should create initiatives that promote youth leadership development programs that encompass mentorship, networking opportunities, internships, and skill building.
- Government and philanthropic organizations need to allocate funds to ensure that eligible immigrants receive the appropriate classes and support to become naturalized citizens and engage fully in the political process.
- Latino organizations should step up their efforts to engage in voter registration, education, and mobilization to increase the participation of Latinos in the electoral process and to build the political power by identifying, training and supporting Latino candidates for local school councils, suburban school boards, planning and zoning boards, and higher public office that represent the interests of the Latino community.
- Municipal leaders should increase outreach efforts and work collaboratively with existing institutions to increase civic participation among foreign and native-born Latinos and take a proactive, long-term approach to appointing them to various city boards and commissions.
- Latino leaders and community organizations should train and certify deputy registrars and conduct registration campaigns by partnering with African American organizations, unions and others who have been successful in this area.
- Municipalities and community-based organizations need to provide immigrants with Spanish language information necessary to understand how local institutions work. This information should be disseminated through schools, churches and other institutions that serve Latino immigrants.

An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective

Latino Policy Forum

Conclusion

It is not enough to have a policy document without the political power to make it a reality. Therefore, the next steps are to strengthen the organizing capacity of our community to effect policy changes and to build alliances with non-Latinos to work on a broader social justice agenda.

We know that our community is at various stages of social, economic and political participation. During the meetings, participants expressed various views about how they see themselves in relation to the power dynamics of our society. Some are invited to be at the decision-making table, some are demanding to be at the table, and some want to transform the composition of the table. There was general agreement, however, that leadership development and an increase in civic participation are essential components to move this agenda forward.

During the last two years, Latinos United has gone through a profound transformation. We became a regional organization and expanded our housing advocacy agenda to include education and immigration. This led to new advocacy strategies and an expansion of relationships and alliances. To best reflect this transformation, we changed the name of our organization from Latinos United to Latino Policy Forum. With this new name we engage the future while honoring our past as Latinos United. We look forward to continued and new partnerships as we move forward this American Agenda from a Latino Perspective.

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Latino Policy Forum

Formerly Latinos United

Mission

To build the power, influence, and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform public policies that ensure the well being of our community and society as a whole.

Vision

The Latino Policy Forum envisions societal prosperity, unity, and equity in our nation and in the global community.

Endorsing Organizations

Alivio Medical Center
Association House of Chicago
Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation
Centro Romero
Centro San Bonifacio
Coalición Latinos Unidos de Lake County
Confederation of Mexican Federations in Chicago
Durango Unido En Chicago
Erie Neighborhood House
El Valor
Family Focus Aurora
Family Focus Nuestra Familia
Federación de Clubes Michoacanos en Illinois
Hispanic Housing Development Corporation
Holy Family Immigrant Center
Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees
Instituto del Progreso Latino
La Casa Norte
Latino Education Alliance
Latino Engagement Community Council
Latino Organization of the Southwest
Latinos Progresando
Little Village Community Development Corporation
League of United Latin American Citizens, Illinois
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Mujeres Latinas en Acción
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities
Near Northwest Neighborhood Network/Humboldt Park Empowerment
Partnership
Onward Neighborhood House
Salud Latina/Latino Health
Seguin Services, Inc.
Spanish Coalition for Housing
Spanish Coalition for Jobs
The Resurrection Project
The Telpochcalli Community Education Project

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