

February 10, 2014

Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

On behalf of the nearly 70 Latino community-based organizations represented by the Hispanic Federation throughout New York State, we write to ask for your support and leadership in improving the social and economic conditions of Latino New Yorkers.

New York's Latino residents are enduring a very challenging time, ranging from the highest poverty rate in the state, a staggering educational gap and grave health disparities. The development of this year's New York State Budget represents a critical opportunity to help uplift Latino children, families and communities through strategic investments in much-needed social programs and services. On behalf of our network of Latino nonprofits across the state of New York, we ask that you champion and help to ensure the following Latino community priorities are included in the Fiscal Year 2015 New York State Budget.

Supporting Latino Nonprofit Organizations

- Establish Neighborhood Initiatives (formerly known as Member Items) to provide resources to community-based organizations running the state's priority human service system. These organizations are not only the front-line service providers for our children and families, but economic engines and leadership incubators for our community. Since the elimination of state legislative discretionary funds, millions in funds, countless human services and programs, and too many jobs and nonprofits in our community have been lost.

Education

- While it is promising that the Executive Budget includes investments in base education aid and a commitment to statewide universal pre-kindergarten, the funding does not go far enough to meet the needs in our communities across the state. With Latinos and English Language Learners (ELLs) facing disproportionately low graduation rates, we urge the state to fully fund education aid per the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court decision and support New York City's plan to fund full-day pre-kindergarten for all four year olds and middle school after-school programs, by instituting a modest income tax surcharge on high income earners. We also ask the state to increase its support for the development of community schools, after-school programs and Latino parent engagement initiatives.

Higher Education

- We are again disappointed by the Executive Budget's failure to include the New York State DREAM Act (A2597A-Moya/S2378B-Peralta), which would allow undocumented youth to access vitally-needed Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) aid, as well as, establish a DREAM Fund and open access to 529 accounts. We urge you to ensure the final FY'15 Budget includes the DREAM Act and \$20 million in additional TAP aid to support these promising future leaders.
- To increase Latino student success at the City University of New York (CUNY), we request additional aid in the FY'15 Budget for successful preparation and retention initiatives including CUNY College Now, the Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP), Single Stop and CUNY Start.

Health

- To build on New York's nationally-recognized success in implementing the New York State Marketplace, the FY'15 Budget should establish a new Basic Health Program, permissible under the federal Affordable Care Act and federally funded at 95% of marketplace rates, to provide quality, affordable insurance to adults living between 133% and 200% of the federal poverty level and lawfully present immigrants living below the 200% federal poverty level who are ineligible for Medicaid.
- Over 700,000 New Yorkers are living with diabetes and almost half are Latino. To address the epidemic impacting the Latino community, the FY'15 Budget should include funding to establish a Diabetes Prevention and Care Initiative that supports a community-based organization bilingual public education campaign focused on early detection, getting tested and proper treatment and care targeted to Latinos.
- We are grateful to see that AIDS Institute was not eliminated in this year's Executive Budget. Funding for the Institute supports a network of providers that offer HIV/AIDS testing and public education and the initiative should be expanded.
- The FY'15 Budget should establish new funding to provide targeted HIV/AIDS testing and public education for Latino MSMs (Men having Sex with Men), one of the fastest growing infected populations in the state.
- Building on the state's leadership in reinvesting Medicaid savings in supportive housing for people with chronic conditions, we recommended the FY'15 Budget include legislation to prevent homelessness for permanently disabled people living with HIV/AIDS (A7782-Rodriguez/S3022-Hoylman). The "30 percent rent cap" policy would extend the same affordable housing protection that already exists in every other comparable low-income housing program in New York to the HIV/AIDS rental assistance program, so that low-income earners living with HIV/AIDS in the program pay no more than 30 percent of their disability income towards rent.

- It is paramount that all medical decisions remain exclusively at the discretion of the provider and the patient. For that reason, the “prescriber prevails” provision in Medicaid Fee-For-Service should remain, regardless of the availability of a generically equivalent drug.

Human Services

- The Office for New Americans Initiative is in dire need of an increase in funds to properly deliver quality English-for-Speakers-of-Other-Languages (ESOL) training, naturalization assistance, entrepreneurial support for new Americans, and immigration law consultations to the state's rapidly growing immigrant community.
- We thank the Governor for allocating emergency funds to food pantries in November. To address New York's growing food insecurity crisis, the FY'15 Budget should increase funds for food pantries and soup kitchens and increase state matching funds for the WIC Program.
- Adult Literacy Education (ALE) and other funding for adult English classes, adult basic education and general equivalency diploma (GED) programs should be increased to ensure more New Yorkers and newcomers can get better-paying jobs and support their families.
- The FY'15 Executive Budget's inclusion of \$21 million in additional funds for the Child Care Block Grant will ensure many more working families can access needed child care and help more Latino families achieve economic security.
- We recommend the restoration of previously-reduced TANF Funding for anti-poverty and workforce development programs including The Bridge Program, Career Pathways, Transitional Jobs and Wage Subsidy.
- While the FY'15 Executive Budget provides some additional funds for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), millions more are necessary to maintain existing slots for Latino and other teens. SYEP is vital to teach our young women and men the value of labor and appropriate workplace conduct, as well as, an essential source of income for many Latino families struggling to make ends meet.
- The FY'15 Executive Budget can do more for Latino seniors. The Federation supports the proposed increases to such programs as Community Services to the Elderly (CSE), Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly (EISEP) and Wellness in Nutrition, but cost-of-living adjustments also need to be included this year, as in recent years.

Housing

- We oppose language in the FY'15 Executive Budget that prevents state reimbursement for rental-subsidy programs like New York City's defended Advantage Program. The final state budget must remove this language and restore a rental-subsidy program to combat the state's growing homelessness crisis.

These are priorities of the state's Latino community and will ensure all corners of the state reap the benefits of our economic recovery. We thank you for your attention and look forward to discussing these priorities with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "José Calderón", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

José Calderón
President