

OHIO COMMISSION ON HISPANIC/LATINO AFFAIRS FY 22-23 BIENNIAL BUDGET TESTIMONY

Thursday, April 22, 2021
Ohio Senate Local Government & Elections Committee
134th General Assembly

Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and distinguished members of the Ohio Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs' (OCHLA) mission and budget allocation in House Bill 110.

My name is Lilly Cavanaugh and it is my honor to serve you as OCHLA's Executive Director. On behalf of our Board, staff, and over 456,000 Hispanic/Latino Ohioan constituents, thank you for your consideration of Governor DeWine's biennial funding recommendation for our agency that is reflected in the state operating budget bill.

The Commission was established by Governor James Rhodes on July 8, 1977 with mandates to advise the Governor and legislature on issues affecting Hispanic Ohioans, to connect Latino and Latino serving organizations across the state, and to build capacity for Latino leaders and grassroots organizations. We remain committed to implementing the current administration's priorities. Our focus at the present time is on education, health equity, economic development, job creation, and diversity and inclusion initiatives. Most recently, our Commission has played a crucial role in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing our expertise on outreach strategies, communications, and community engagement. From serving in the Minority Health Strike Team and Minority Communities Vaccine Team to producing over 100 hours of live radio programs to reach and inform the Latino community and exceeding 400,000 social media impressions, we have mobilized and adapted to respond to the needs of your constituents across Ohio.

In the past twenty years, Ohio has undergone a major transformation in the makeup of its resident population, with the minority population increasing by 38% percent since 2000, and the white population decreasing by 4 percent. Hispanics and Latinos are Ohio's fastest growing minority population with a 110 percent increase since the year 2000.

As our community grows, so does the magnitude of Latinos' contributions in areas including, but not limited to, business, education, government, science, and the arts. There are currently more than 16,000 Hispanic/Latino owned businesses in Ohio with over \$2.8 billion in receipts that employ more than 23,600 workers. Hispanics/Latinos are also repre-

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State Senator
District 3 - Franklin County



sented in healthcare and social services, where they comprise over 12 percent of workers in those industries. Twenty four Latino elected officials serve in cities, counties and state government—including our General Assembly—and there are more than 16,300 Latino Military Veterans who along with Hispanic men and women in active duty serve and protect Ohio and the nation.

During this biennium, our Commission's summits and training events have brought new knowledge and best practices to over 3,500 leaders. Despite having to quickly adapt to functioning during the pandemic, our work has continued undaunted. For example, our recent \$150,000 grant with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services enabled the Commission to fund two new pilot Mental Health Navigators Projects in Columbus and Cincinnati to meet the needs of Latinos for adequate mental and behavioral health services. In a period of six months during the pandemic, these programs served 1,114 clients with 95% of them being of Hispanic heritage.

Our Virtual 2020 Ohio Latino Affairs Summit presented thirty subject matter experts and more than 150 participants who covered topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on health and access, the challenges faced by teachers and Latino students in virtual learning environments, and strategies to pivot Latino business models to prosper during the crisis. Through a collaboration with the National Hispanic & Latino Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network, our Commission hosted four webinars that equipped 1,847 professionals in healthcare and social services with the tools to understand and respond to triggers, trauma, and distress during national emergencies within the Latino community. Our Commission also played a key role in outreach efforts for participation in the 2020 Census and 2020 Elections. In the last two years, we issued four Latino Community Reports in topics ranging from Food Insecurity, Mental Health, The Digital Divide during the pandemic, and most recently, Financial Literacy and Access to provide insight, context, and a deeper understanding on how these topics affect Hispanic Ohioans.

Our small, but mighty team regularly participates in ten different Latino networking groups across Ohio and recently established Latino networks for Akron, Canton, and Youngstown. We work closely with migrant and seasonal worker supporting organizations and engage regularly with Latino grassroots organizations to support their growth and capacity building. The Commission's virtual hub of directories is a one stop solution to constituents, local and state government, and those in the public and private sectors wanting to connect with Latinos in Ohio. In 2020, Commission staff served in advisory roles on 18 different councils to provide our expertise. Furthermore, the Commission regularly partners with state agencies in projects and outreach initiatives, for example the Ohio Department of Education's 2020 Diversifying the Education Profession in Ohio Taskforce, the Secretary of State's Diversity and Empowerment Advisory Council, and the Ohio's Department of Health Pandemic Response Team.

Our 3.5 FTE's are complimented by a robust internship and volunteer program. In 2020, the Commission was awarded the AmeriCorps Vista Program Site grant which enabled us to place four members. Two of these members are serving at El Centro in Lorain and Su Casa in Cincinnati and two serve with the Commission in Columbus. These four AmeriCorps Vista Members are directly engaged in education, economic and workforce initiatives, and program development. Additionally, our university internship program has continued despite the pandemic and we have been able to offer this valuable in-depth cross cultural experience to undergraduate and graduate students at The Ohio State University.

Recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will take hard work and steady commitment of all of us. We know this crisis has brought to surface many challenges, but it also has propelled innovation and teamwork. We know how interconnected our futures are and how critical it is to continue our mission to



Riffe Center - 18th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215-6108

tel 614.466.8333
fax 614.995.0896
<http://ochla.ohio.gov>

foster diversity and inclusion. For a modest investment of about one dollar per Latino constituent per fiscal year in Ohio, our Commission will have the resources necessary to play its part in rebuilding Ohio's economy, education, and healthcare systems.

We respectfully ask you to support our Commission's FY 22-23 biennial budget recommendation as submitted by Governor DeWine in the amount of \$464,047 for each year in the biennium, respectively. Our Board and team will demonstrate a solid return on investment and continue to empower Latinos, the fastest growing minority in the state of Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.



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