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OHIO COMMISSION ON HISPANIC/LATINO AFFAIRS FY 24-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET TESTIMONY

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Ohio House of Representatives
135th General Assembly

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, Representatives Dobos, Robinson and White, My name is Lilleana Cavanaugh, and I have the pleasure of serving you as Executive Director of the Ohio Latino Affairs Commission. On behalf of OCHLA's Board of Commissioners and 500,000 Hispanic Ohioans, we ask for your support of Governor DeWine's FY 24-25 budget recommendation for our agency.

The Latino population in Ohio currently comprises 4.0% of Ohio's total population, the vast majority of whom were born in the United States. We live in all 88 counties. Our median age is 26.9 years old, and we represent one of Ohio's fastest growing workforce populations. There are over 20,500 Latino owned businesses in Ohio. Two thousand of those businesses employ nearly 19,000 individuals with annual payroll of more than \$630 million.

Given the focus of this subcommittee, please note we have over 120,422 Hispanic students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. Likewise, as a Veteran herself, our chair will be particularly pleased to know Ohio is home to 20,000 Latinos who have proudly served in our nation's Armed Forces.

Our commission was established in 1977 by Governor James Rhodes in order to advise the Executive Branch and General Assembly on issues impacting our Latino community. Our mandates are to connect our constituents to local, state, and federal resources, and to build partnerships with government and Latino serving organizations. OCHLA is governed by an 11-member board appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the legislature. We employ a very small staff and carefully focus our work on Governor DeWine's priorities in areas of health access and equity, education, job creation and economic development.

A quick analysis of our GRF budget request reflects that payroll and operational costs account for the lion's share of our expenses which leaves a very limited amount of funds for community programming. Thus, to meet our programmatic mandates in the last biennium, we significantly increased partnerships with organizations that support the empowerment of Latinos, and our grant applications in order to secure funding for our community outreach and leadership development efforts.



For example, in keeping with the Governor's top priorities, our commission has prioritized mental health programming. In 2022, OCHLA partnered with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and secured a **\$885,939** grant during FY 22-23. Our Latino Mental Health Navigator Program seeks to reduce disparities in availability, accessibility, and quality of behavioral healthcare services for members of the Hispanic community. Seven project sites were strategically placed throughout the state of Ohio, with each site receiving specialized technical mental health training led by El Centro de Servicios Sociales in Lorain, Prevention Action Alliance, and the Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC). Our Navigators program has successfully made mental health resources more accessible for Ohio communities, and we intend to apply for future grant funding to support this priority health initiative.

Kent State University will be our partner for the 2023 Latino Affairs Summit that will bring together Latinos, advocates, state and local government, educators and the public to discuss education, health, workforce and economic development. Their economic and in-kind investment to make this event possible is another example of our partnerships. The Commission continues to partner with the Ohio Department of Education on several committees in efforts to improve the needs of English Learners in Ohio. The committees we are actively involved in include the Whole Child Advisory Group, Ohio English Learner Advisory Committee, and Roadmap for Families of Students of English Learners. This year we are hosting Hispanic Legislative Visit Day, where educators and Latino leaders from across the state of Ohio are invited to attend, accompanied by business leaders, mental health practitioners, young professionals, high school and college students, to connect with their representatives and discuss important matters of impact to their communities. TESOL, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and Esperanza, Inc. are two partners for the event that are leading our education advocacy agenda, and are building a panel of education experts to address how we can improve the educational experience for our students.

Please know our Commission runs a lean and efficient operation with an exceptional return on investment. Our agency employs just three full time positions (Executive Director, Public Policy Officer, Latino Community Liaison) and one intermittent position (Administrative Professional.) Although we do not currently have enough funding to fill our vacant Organizations Development Center position, we hope to secure enough resources for this position in order to meet our capacity development objectives. Our three key programmatic priorities for FY 24-25 are the following:

- Maintain present support systems and services functioning at optimal level, including our resource directories such as OLANet, constituent services, an effective social media presence, along with continued community engagement to connect Latinos to government and vice versa.
- Increase capacity building opportunities in Education, Health, Workforce and Economic Development to empower the Latino community in Ohio and support their development and success.
- Advise the Governor, the General Assembly, state agencies and partners on issues affecting Latinos, particularly regarding, health and equity efforts, diversity, and inclusion.

The commission has built strong networks with Latino-serving organizations and community leadership, and it acts as a vital resource to the community and an important bridge for government. Considering the post Covid-19 recovery phase we are experiencing as we serve Latino organizations and the public, our plan is to maintain existing programs and expand in response to demand. Additionally, we provide important assistance to state agencies in their outreach strategies and services to the Latino and



multilingual community in Ohio. Our work in the COVID-19 response is an excellent example of this type of engagement and support to the statewide enterprise. Our efficient and conservative approach to the 2024-2025 Biennium budget will provide us the opportunity to adapt to the new environment and opportunities and meet our statutory mandates.

As you know, organizations will continue to adjust and reinvent themselves once the federal government formally ends the pandemic health emergency. Program sustainability, access to funding and decreased staffing are among the main concerns expressed by many of the organizations that interact with the commission on a regular basis. With your support, our Commission will continue to support organizations that serve Latinos and connect our constituents to essential government and program services. We can provide workforce development pipelines for the jobs of the future and expand on critical programs that impact mental health and educational opportunities. Together we can keep Ohio growing and thriving.

Chair Richardson, and distinguished members of the House Finance Primary and Secondary Education subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify. On behalf of our Board Chair and Executive Committee, I am happy to answer any questions committee members may have at this time.

