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

Tuesday, May 2, 2023  
Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
The Ohio Senate  
135th General Assembly

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Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and distinguished members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources 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 33.

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 505,000 Hispanic Ohioans, I 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 Latino population in Ohio currently comprises 4.2% 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. There are over 120,422 Hispanic students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, and Ohio is home to 20,000 Latinos who have proudly served in our nation's Armed Forces. Latinos also play an important role in Ohio's agriculture industry and contribute as H2-A workers, migrant and seasonal workers, thus meeting a need when Ohio is experiencing an unprecedented agricultural labor shortage.

Our 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. OCHLA is governed by an 11-member board appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the legislature. We remain committed to implementing the current administration's priorities, and are focused on education, health equity, economic development, job creation, diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Our small, but mighty team regularly participates in ten different Latino networking groups across Ohio to interact with over 300 leaders on a regular basis. 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, state government, and those in the public and private sectors wanting to connect with Latinos in Ohio. In 2022, Commission staff served in 18 different task forces and advisory roles to provide our expertise on matters related to Latinos, government services and outreach strategy. Furthermore, the Commission regularly partners with state agencies and serve on the Ohio Department of Education's Whole Child Advisory Group, Ohio English Learner Advisory Committee, and Roadmap for Families of Students of English Learners. We also serve with the Secretary of State's Diversity and Empowerment Advisory Council, and the Health Equity Interagency Workgroup with Ohio Department of Health to name a few.

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 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 increased our grant applications in order to secure funding for 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. Just last week, the commission hosted our Hispanic Legislative Visit Day with the support of five community partners that included universities, banks and Latino led companies. We hosted over 200 Latino business leaders, advocates, young professionals, high school and college students, who met their legislators to discuss important matters of impact to their communities.

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 we can expand access and support for critical programs that impact mental health and educational and workforce development opportunities. Together we can keep Ohio growing and thriving.

Chair Schaffer, and distinguished members of the Senate's Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions committee members may have at this time.

