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

Thursday, February 18, 2021
House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
134th General Assembly

Chair Cross, Ranking Member Howse, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs' (OCHLA) mission and budget consideration.

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 House Bill 110.

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, 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.

During this biennium, our 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 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 a virtual learning environment, 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 service 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 the 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 sector wanting to connect with Latinos in Ohio. In 2020, members of the Commission served on advisory roles in 18 different councils to provide their 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 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. These four AmeriCorps Vista Members are directly engaged in education, economic 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 the steady commitment of all of us. We know this crisis has brought to surface many challenges, but it also has forced innovation and teamwork. We know how interconnected our futures are and how critical it is to continue our mission to foster diversity and inclusion. For a modest investment of about one dollar per Latino constituent in Ohio, our Commission will have the resources necessary to play its part in rebuilding Ohio's economy, education and health 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.

