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OHIO COMMISSION ON HISPANIC/LATINO AFFAIRS HOUSE BILL 72 TESTIMONY

Wednesday, April 21, 2021
Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
134th General Assembly

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and Honorable Members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 72, which would designate September 15 to October 15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in the State of Ohio.

My name is Manuel Lopez and it is my privilege to serve as the Chairman of the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, also known as OCHLA. Today I am here representing the 11 members of our 44th Board of Commissioners and thank our House Legislative Board Members, Representatives Miranda and Cutrona, for bringing forth this legislation.

As a young student living in Mexico looking for a great education and wanting to experience the American Dream, I enrolled at a college in Springfield, Ohio. I had the support of the Dunham, Lehman, and Ark families to help me navigate the complexities of the process. I was able to get a great education and am currently working for a great company, LexisNexis in Dayton, Ohio. Fast forward 20 years, I have my own family, three wonderful daughters, one of which will be representing Ohio in the National Spelling bee this year. Ohio has been my home for all this time and over the years I have met great people and more importantly a supportive community. Seeing a vibrant community, I have seen first-hand how Hispanic and Latino entrepreneurs have started many businesses around Ohio, friends and relatives enlisting in the armed forces, becoming nurses, physicians, etc. Recognizing this legislation will celebrate and encourage the community at large to continue to energize and continue to contribute in a positive way in the State of Ohio.

I now invite OCHLA's Executive Director Lilleana Cavanaugh to provide more insight on Ohio's Hispanic/Latino community and the Commission's support for House Bill 72.

My name is Lilleana Cavanaugh and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs. 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. While much of the growth within Ohio's Hispanic/Latino population has occurred among the Mexican community, Ohio is also home to Puerto Ricans, Costa Ricans, Guatemalans, Cubans, El Salvadorans, Spaniards, Venezuelans, Colombians, and more. This diversity of heritage is part of what makes our community flourish in Ohio, and the name "Hispanic and Latino Heritage Month" aims to celebrate this diversity by encompassing Ohioans of both Latin American and Spanish origin.

As our community grows, so does the magnitude of our 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 represented 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. House Bill 72 is an important step to honoring and recognizing the contributions that Hispanics/Latinos have made in these fields and others.

Finally, data shows that Hispanics/Latinos are the future of Ohio. Hispanic/Latino's median age of 25.8 is 13.7 years younger than the median age of all Ohioans (39.5), and nearly 30 percent of our community falls under 15 years old. Hispanic/Latino students make up 6.2 percent of Ohio's student body with over 117,000 students enrolled in our K-12 public schools. It is our hope that designating a "Hispanic and Latino Heritage Month" will inspire those younger members of our community to continue enriching our state with their unique competencies and perspectives now and throughout the future.

On behalf of the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, we ask for your favorable consideration of House Bill 72. We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committee and welcome any questions you may have.



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