

Testimony of the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs

Sunset Review Committee

December 7, 2015

Chair Brown, Vice Chair Jordan, and honorable members of the committee, I am Tony Ortiz and I serve as Chairman of the Commission on Hispanic-Latino Affairs. It is my honor to stand before you and to offer testimony regarding the critical need for and performance of the agency I serve.

According to the latest Census figures, Latinos are leading population growth in 87 of 88 Ohio counties and the Latino population has experienced a 76 percent increase since the year 2000. Although overall population growth in Ohio continues to lag, Latinos have outpaced projected population growth in the state by 43 percent since 1993. Our commission is an indispensable link between government and our growing community, and we are committed to helping develop and implement policies that address the needs of Hispanic Ohioans.

The Ohio Revised Code establishes the agency's purpose, which is to advise state government on issues affecting Hispanic Ohioans, to connect the diverse Latino communities across the state, and to build the capacity of community organizations so they may better serve the fast growing population of Ohio. Each biennium, the commission selects a number of strategic initiatives guided by the stated priorities of members of the General Assembly and the Office of the Governor. Examples of our work include:

1. Economic Empowerment

We promote entrepreneurship, support small businesses and help stimulate economic growth through our work with the Ohio Hispanic Chambers of Commerce and other economic development organizations. We are committed to increasing the number of Hispanic MBE-EDGE registered businesses, and consistently promote the services of the Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) and Minority Business Assistance Centers (MBACs), so that more Latino businesses can grow, compete, and contribute to Ohio's economic development. In the 2007 Survey of Business Owners there were more than 9,700 Hispanic-owned businesses in Ohio representing over \$3.2 billion in receipts. We are pleased to report that preliminary numbers of the 2012 Survey of Business Owners, which will be released later this month, estimate there to be 16,117 Hispanic-owned businesses in Ohio — a 66 percent increase from five years ago. Consequently, the Commission's support of Hispanic businesses will continue to grow.

2. Health Transformation

The commission supports initiatives that improve health and promote a healthy lifestyle for Hispanic Ohioans. Our yearly events like the Latino Health Summit, Health Workshops and Minority Health Month Events, allow us to foster connections with health experts, organizations and individuals. By establishing connections, we can shift our community's attention from a curative approach focused on health disparities to a preventative approach that teaches accountability for health and wellbeing. Our commission is focused on transforming health outcomes for the Latino community, which will reduce costs to the government, while enhancing the quality of life for all Hispanic Ohioans.

3. Improving Educational Opportunities

Our annual Latino Education Summit convenes the Department of Education, universities, and

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community organizations to share and apply solutions that increase educational opportunities for Hispanic students in Ohio. Last year, thirteen best practices were shared at the Summit outlining innovative ideas to improve the overall educational attainment of Hispanic students. This year, we have also worked with the Central Ohio Educational Service Center to develop a professional development workshop for teachers that addresses the barriers many Latino students face as they relate to education.

4. Increasing a Global Presence and Supporting Diversity

According to the Development Services Agency, Ohio is the ninth-largest exporting state in the U.S., with merchandise exports valued at \$52.1 billion in 2014. Supporting the state's growth in the global economy is enhanced by our ability to connect with Ohio's multicultural community, and encourage the integration of growing diverse populations. The Latino Affairs Commission serves as a link to connect Latinos and other diverse populations to each other and to the mainstream community. We consistently provide expertise in cultural competence, language access and diversity. Furthermore, by means of our interagency council statute, our agency works to maximize efficiencies, reduce costs, increase communication capabilities, and strengthen relationships between state agencies and the community. We work closely with ODJFS, the Secretary of State's office, the Attorney General's office, the Bureau of Workers Compensation and DAS, among others.

As Ohio's Latino population continues to grow, we prepare to meet their needs by working strategically and innovatively. For example, our OLANet Directory is an electronic database of nearly 300 Latino serving organizations in Ohio that is available to general public. Through our English as a Second Language Directory and the Catalogue of Latino Outreach Initiatives, we inform Latinos about language and government services available in Spanish. Using social media networks, we transmit over 5,500 events and public announcements annually to the Hispanic community. Our Public Policy Center issues monthly briefs and special Latino Community Reports that inform the community and the legislature on the most relevant issues affecting Latinos. Through our regular capacity building events, we empower Latino leaders and grassroots organizations to explore partnerships and consider social ventures as innovative sources of funding. Our partnerships with public and private entities allow us to host numerous summits and workshops with little direct cost, while simultaneously building bridges of communication among the community and important partners.

To accomplish our mandates, the agency currently employs 4 mission-critical full-time equivalents (FTEs). However, our agency would benefit from adding one more FTE to carry out the agency's duties and meet the public's expectations. Approximately 95% of the agency's total funding is derived from the General Revenue Fund (GRF). Our governing board has eleven commissioners who are voting members of the governing board and are appointed by the Governor directly or with the recommendation of legislative leaders. Board members are compensated for their work and expenses related to the performance of official business. In addition, there are four non-voting members of the commission's governing board: two members of the Ohio House of Representatives and two members of the Ohio Senate.

Further details about the work of our commission are available in our [2014 Annual Report](#). The Agency Questionnaire also includes a list of the annual events, as well as reports and directories that our commission presents each year.

Thank you very much for your invitation to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have at this time.

