



LATINO LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE OF NEW JERSEY

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT
"Excerpts"
To the LLANJ General Assembly
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On October 16th and 17th of 1999 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, dedicated Latino leaders from throughout New Jersey gathered together to shape, design and structure a new organization capable of transforming our Latino communities into a powerful force capable of developing statewide initiatives for the benefit of all. That initial group of Latinos, ranging from seasoned and mature leaders to dynamic and youthful "soon to become" leaders, bound together our mutual strength and set aside our differences to create an organization that reflected our true nature: a real Alliance of Latino leaders.

We committed ourselves to the difficult and complex task of bringing together representatives from disparate national origin groups (Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, Dominicans, Peruvians, etc.). We also sought out organizations serving the Latino community but dedicated to different issues such as social, services, commerce, immigration, labor, health, arts, education, law and politics. This coming together for the greater good of the community necessitated a non-partisan approach and a fair geographic representation to ensure that no specific community was disenfranchised. We decided to directly confront the barriers and suspicions that have long existed in the Latino community; suspicions that isolate us from each other and foster weakness, despair and inertia in our community. We knew that the only way to break down those barriers and erase suspicions was to mobilize the aggregate talents of as many individuals as possible through a democratic process of representation. The goal was to create a single "voice" for a community that, in the past, was not able to speak with one voice.

Over the past 3 years our organization has steadily grown. Many of our accomplishments will be described today in detail by committee chairs and chapter directors. I would like to briefly highlight some of those achievements:

We mobilized in support of a fair and comprehensive immigration reform and spearheaded the development of legislation granting driving privileges to the undocumented. The Chairman of our immigration committee, Mahonny Hidalgo, has become one of the most articulate and sought after advocates in the state defending undocumented workers and advancing the struggle for immigration reform. We defended many immigrants who were targeted with pre-textual labor and housing legal problems. We are currently engaged in supporting a class action lawsuit against the New Brunswick mayor, police department, chief of

police and a municipal court judge for their discriminatory practices of imposing excessive bails on Latinos for petty offenses and in disregard of state statutes. We are among the most powerful advocates for education reform in both the state and nation. LLANJ chapters in Camden, New Brunswick and Passaic are in the forefront of their community supporting parents who demand that educational outcomes, not simply financial equity, must be the definition of a “thorough and efficient education” for our children. We have also been active advocating for implementation of Abbott reforms. The Hispanic Directors Association has played the leading role statewide in holding New Jersey accountable for full implementation of the Abbott preschool mandate. Our first Education Conference, in May 2006 brought together advocates and parents who together identified the “taking control of our children’s education through the development of parent organizations” as the primary accountability action needed to improve educational outcomes for our children. We participated in the development and support of a class action lawsuit against the New Jersey Department of Education and 25 school districts on behalf of the parents of over 60,000 children who attend the worst performing 95 schools in the state of New Jersey – known as educational train wrecks.

In addition to our advocacy for respect for the labor of the undocumented, we actively supported PS&G workers in their fight to protect their jobs and livelihoods during the merger and acquisition initiated by Excelon against PSE&G.

We participated in the foundation and development of the United States Hispanic Advocacy Association (USHAA). A national Hispanic organization dedicated to leveraging the purchasing power of our community. This purchasing power of Latinos in the United States is about to reach the amount of one trillion dollars. Our spending power can be harnessed to bring many benefits to our community, and to demonstrate politically our contribution to the wellbeing of the nation.

We have developed a system for screening potential candidates for elected and appointed office who seek our support for their candidacy. The seriousness with which we treat this process has made our endorsement sought after and valuable. We have develop an initial screening policy and process that interviews, makes recommendations concerning endorsement, follows the progress of individuals who seek our support for appointed positions.

We have developed collaborative relationships with the Afro-American, Jewish, Indian, Asian-American communities, some sectors of the labor movement and other groups. We worked with the Rutgers University Law School and ACLU in a law suit demanding voting rights for people on parole or probation.

During last year we formed our health committee. This committee must achieve its full potential in this year of 2007. There many Latino members of the health profession that we shall integrate to our health committee in order to step up our advocacy to bring more and better health care programs to the Latino population. We are currently working in collaboration with Health Institute of New Jersey to develop a program to educate and inform our community about the dangers of diabetes. Disease that afflicts many members of our population.