

# Latino Voices United for Equity

*A 2015 Washington Legislative Agenda*



Presented by the Washington Latino Equity Network

## Acknowledgments

While the network as a whole collaborated on the completion of the 2015 Latino Equity Agenda, contributing writers to this agenda were: Karlah Tanori, Kate Smith, Carolina Gutierrez, Rosa Venancio, Sophia Beltran, Sandy Restrepo, Catalina Angel, Adrian Olivas, Adie Simmons, and Cathy Liu Scott. Felipe Rodriguez-Flores and Natasha El-Sergany contributed additional editing and synthesis. Cover art: All rights reserved by Adream de Valdivia, 2015. AdreamStudios.com.

## Preface

The Washington Latino Equity Network formed in November 2014, after nine Latino non-profit organizations participated in the Washington Latino Nonprofit Leadership Academy, hosted by the Latino Community Fund. During the Academy, these leaders coalesced around a shared vision of lifting up the voices of Latino communities in Washington State and the need for carrying those voices to policy makers. The members of the Latino Equity Network work with thousands of Latino families in communities across the state, from Olympia to Everett to Spokane. The collective knowledge and experience these leaders bring in working with Latino families is enormous, and informed the six common issues contained in this agenda. In addition to the Academy leaders, the Latino Equity Network surveyed hundreds of community members from each locale about the issues and recommendations that are captured in the agenda.

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## Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center's 2011 "Demographic profile of Hispanics in Washington," there are 790,000 Latinos living in Washington State, comprising 12% of the population. Latinos in Washington are overwhelmingly young, with a median age of 23, and a reported 206,000 Latino students enrolled in Washington public schools (19% of all K-12 students). 35% of Washington Latinos are immigrants, and 67% of Latino households speak a language other than English at home, and 31% of Latinos in Washington are not covered by health insurance. These figures underscore the critical importance of Latino voices reaching leaders and lawmakers to ensure we are heard and our communities are able to thrive. In the pursuit of equity for Latinos in Washington, we present our vision of a legislative platform on several key issues.

### **Executive Summary**

The Latino Equity Network selected six key areas of concern for the 2015 Washington legislative session. These are areas we believe have the broadest impact on Latino communities in our state. The issues we chose include: Housing, Education, Health, Employment, Environmental Justice, and Immigration. In the text that follows, the Latino Equity Network indicates our position on these issues in light of the impact we observe on communities we work alongside as a collection of Latino-focused non-profit organizations. Included below are declarations of support for initiatives and movements that we feel best promote the interests of our communities, as well as background information and personal stories we have encountered from Latino individuals and families during the course of our work.

## Housing

*The Latino Equity Network supports:*

- Holding landlords accountable when they ignore written requests to fix hazard conditions and unhealthy environments, as stated in RCW 59.18.085 (Purpose -- 2005 c 364: "The people of the state of Washington deserve decent, safe, and sanitary housing.").
- Providing families with tenants' rights information, resources, and a checklist of unit's current condition before signing a rental contract. This will empower people not only to report violations, but also to protect their families.

### *Background*

In 2010, the U.S Census found that Washington State's Latino population had grown an astonishing 71 percent in the previous decade. As the Latino population is growing rapidly, and our Latino families are contributing and living their lives in Washington State, our families deserve fair access to housing. This housing must be stable, affordable, sanitary, and safe for families to have lives in which housing is the least of their concerns to thrive.

Living with extreme cases of mold in rental units or mobile homes is affecting many Latino families in Washington State. Allergic reactions are the most common health effect of mold. Allergic reactions may happen immediately, or develop after a period of time following exposure. Both growing mold and mold spores may lead to allergic reactions. Symptoms of mold allergy may include sneezing, runny nose, coughing, wheezing, tearing and redness of the eyes, and skin irritation or rash. Mold or mold spores may cause asthma attacks for people who have asthma and are allergic to mold.

We advocate for Latino families that feel unprotected to report poor living conditions affecting their family's health. Latino families must have access to safe reporting of unsafe housing, by increasing community education about tenants laws and rights, housing resources, environment related health issues that can affect their families and in their first language. Certain tenants in the state of Washington have remained in rental housing that does not meet the state's minimum standards for health and safety because they cannot afford to pay the costs of relocation in advance of occupying new safe and habitable housing. In egregious cases, authorities have been forced to condemn properties when landlords have failed to remedy building code or health code

violations after repeated notice, and, as a result, families with limited financial resources have been displaced and left with nowhere to go.

## Education

*The Latino Equity Network supports:*

- Policies that encourage students in Washington State to keep and improve their dual-language capacity.
- More informational outreach to students about the World Language test for high school credit in a second language.
- Efforts to increase the proportion of educators in the state who are Latino.
- Disciplinary policies that focus on bringing students back into the education system instead of forcing them out.
- Requiring that school districts develop Language Access policies and procedures regarding schools' utilization of trained interpreters and other quality interpretation technology or services to communicate with limited English-speaking families and students.
- Passing legislation that prohibits school districts from utilizing K-12 students as interpreters for their parents.
- Requiring that school districts make policies, procedures, academic standards, students rights and responsibilities, and other important communications available to parents in a language they can understand.

### *Background*

In Washington State, 18% of students and 4% of teachers are Latino. More programs are needed to increase the interest of bilingual and bicultural students in becoming teachers in the state. The education system and administration should encourage the inclusion of Spanish and indigenous languages and Latino cultures in schools and classrooms.

Communication with the school is the most basic form of parental engagement and the right of every parent. Latino parents should be able to advocate for their children and make informed decisions about their children's future, but thousands of Spanish-speaking families in our state are unable to do so. All Latino children in the state are entitled to an education that is proactive, not prohibitive, and is supportive, not punitive. Our children also deserve to succeed as they continue their studies past high school, and aim for secondary and trade education.

*Antonio is a 10-year-old English learner who is struggling in school. His teacher suspected he may have special needs, and sent a letter to his parents asking for a meeting to discuss Antonio's lack of academic progress and a Special Education evaluation. Antonio's parents do not speak English well, and could not understand most of the letter. They were very concerned about the terms "special needs" and "evaluation." When they arrived to the school for the meeting, they found that the school had asked Antonio to translate for them. The parents felt humiliated, and found the situation unfair for them and for Antonio. Not only is he a minor who does not have full command of English or Spanish, but the decisions made at that meeting will not be based on his parents' full understanding of the situation.*

## Health

*The Latino Equity Network supports:*

- House Bill 1025, which would request a federal waiver to create the Washington State Health Security Trust.
- The creation of a certified **community health worker (CHW) program curriculum in Spanish**. Currently, this curriculum is only available in English, which limits access to health information for Spanish-speaking residents. CHW's are embedded in the communities where they live, and are often relied upon for resources and information on health care topics. They assist in the continuum of care, and must receive quality training and support.
- Defining **School-Based Health Centers** in Washington State law and policy, thus recognizing them as an important part of the healthcare system. Further, we suggest that Washington integrate SBHCs into Medicaid billing structures to provide these clinics with a steady source of revenue.

### *Background*

The growth in Washington State's Latino population has impacted our state's need for quality, accessibility, and availability of healthcare for people of all ages, from birth to death, and of any gender. Latinos need better access to affordable health coverage and options. While Washington State leads in providing care for Latino children, the lack of available services to our Latino communities is at a crisis. Emergency rooms put families into debt, causing medical treatment avoidance. The leading causes of death for Latino men are heart disease and diabetes that goes untreated. The leading cause of death for Latina women (at a rate 20% higher than non Latinos) is breast cancer. Breast cancer deaths are highest in Latino populations; this illness is often found too late for treatment.

We need to provide culturally appropriate health care services and information in clear language to support different Spanish language dialects and ethnic backgrounds. We need to provide consistent



translation and interpretation services to meet the medical needs of our population. This includes prevention information, treatment, and follow-up care. We support a healthcare system that provides health care to all Washington State residents. Young Latinos in particular need better health care access, such as health centers at school sites.. Healthy students perform better and have higher school attendance. Latino youth are our fastest-growing population. Let's teach healthy habits and self-care early.

*Velma received information about her breast exam in English. The doctor smiled at her as he gave her the sheet that said "mammogram appointment." Unable to speak English, Velma thought the worst: she must have cancer. Velma hid the letter until a friend shared her own mammogram experience. She revealed the letter to her friend, who explained the process. Velma waited 6 months to take a baseline mammogram because she did not receive information in Spanish*

## Employment

*The Latino Equity Network supports:*

- Policies to allow liens for unpaid wages, increase potential damages for wage theft, and prevent retaliation against employees who report abuses.
- Increasing the capacity of those mechanisms already in place to enforce wage and hour law.
- Growing the capacity of low-wage workers and their allies to organize against workers' rights abuses in their communities locally, and to join in statewide and regional campaigns.

### *Background*

Although Washington State is moving towards a recovery from the recession, employment continues to be one area of concern. More workers are struggling to stay afloat by working several part-time jobs, with no benefits and very low wages. Latinos in Washington State are disproportionately represented in these lower-wage jobs, and are among the groups at highest risk for wage theft, and remain underrepresented in most professions.

Wage theft is the illegal underpayment or non-payment of workers' wages. It affects thousands of Washington State workers each year, often forcing them to choose between paying the rent or putting food on the table. Wage theft is more prevalent in low-wage industries and among vulnerable immigrant workers in construction, restaurant, landscaping, painting, agricultural, greenhouse/floral, and janitorial work. Wage theft happens in both small and large companies.

*Mario worked 6 months with a construction company under a signed contract, which guaranteed he would receive full payment for his work once the project was completed. At the completion of his project, he was presented with a check for the work completed. When Mario took the check to the bank, he was informed it had no funds. The employer assured him that funds would be available by the end of the week. Mario waited, and 2 days later, he received a letter notifying him that the company that had hired him to do the work had filed for bankruptcy.*

Only 43 percent of Latino workers have access to paid leave, compared to 59 percent of whites, 61 percent of African Americans, and 62 percent of Asians. Latinos are also the least likely group to have access to even unpaid leave—when they or a family member gets sick, they truly have no recourse.

Moving forward, it is necessary that our state pass legislation that will improve job quality for all workers, but especially low-wage workers, who play a significant role in our state’s economy. We need policies that will help improve working conditions, prevent wage theft and increase benefits for all these workers that contribute to economy in Washington State.

## Environmental Justice

*The Latino Equity Network supports:*

- **The Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act**, which would ban the use of toxic flame retardants in children’s products and furniture, allow state government to obtain information from manufacturers on their use of toxic flame retardants, and ensure the fire safety of products is not compromised by providing an exemption to the ban if safer alternatives are not available.
- **The Toxics Reduction Act**, which is based on the clean water policy brief released by the Governor in July 2014. This legislation will help reduce the impact of toxics on human health and the environment. Protecting these resources is important for the well-being of the state’s environment, economy, and our people.
- Programs that utilize a community-based participatory research frame network in order to better address the environmental and occupational health risks in Yakima Valley and farm worker communities. El Proyecto Bienestar (EPB) is a program in the Yakima Valley that provides research and activities building community and trust. In communities where English is a second language, the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area Education and



Outreach Workgroup plans to develop outreach activities to educate the population on water quality and the effects of nitrates, and materials in the language people speak locally. With proper education, outreach and well-testing, contamination from nitrates and other chemicals can be reduced.

- The **Carbon Pollution Accountability Act** (HB 1314) (CPAA), which would move Washington towards a healthier, more sustainable economy by limiting greenhouse gas emissions and selling permits to allow the remaining emissions. Permit sales from the bill would generate hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding for education, transportation, and housing. The CPAA also addresses the disproportionate impact of these issues on low-income communities by funding the Working Families Tax Rebate, establishing an environmental justice oversight board, and creating a study of communities most impacted by pollution around the state in order to help direct investments.

### *Background*

Latinos in Washington State are part of the labor force in agriculture, industries, and local business as well. Carbon pollution presents many threats to the well-being of our communities, from respiratory illnesses caused by toxic substances, to floods and droughts resulting from climate change. Research shows that Latino children are most often exposed to air pollutants, pesticides, toxic industrial chemicals, mercury, and lead. This exposure leads to long-term consequences in the future connected to environmental contaminants, and health conditions like ADHD, asthma, low weight birth, obesity, and in more severe cases, developmental disabilities and cancer. Latino Washingtonians want healthy children. Banning cancer-causing activities will help create safer communities to learn, play, and work. Our children deserve a safe and healthy world.

## **Immigration**

*The Latino Equity Network supports:*

- The **Washington Family Unity Act**, which would affirm the practices of local law enforcement in 19 Washington counties by prohibiting unconstitutional extensions of someone's detention based solely on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainer requests without a judicial warrant.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ICE Detainer Request (Immigration Hold) - ICE requests to local authorities to hold a person after release based solely on their immigration status, without a separate finding of probable cause. Federal courts have

- Not requiring Washington residents to obtain enhanced licenses, nor restricting residents of the state from domestic travel or entry into federal buildings. People in Washington state who are seeking a driver's license but don't have legal status to live in the U.S. should still get the restricted card and legally drive.

### *Background*

In early 2014, numerous federal courts issued rulings finding that local jurisdictions could be held liable for detaining community members solely on an ICE detainer request without a finding of probable cause. As a result of the court decisions, most Washington state counties revised their policies, and no longer engage in post-release detention based on an ICE detainer request. These changes, additionally informed by a prior Washington court ruling finding that local law enforcement agencies do not have authority to enforce federal immigration laws, declare a commitment to ensure that fair, legal procedures are afforded to all.

The REAL ID Act sets forth new federally mandated requirements for all state driver's licenses and ID cards. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has set standards similar to requirements already in place for most states throughout the country. Driver's licenses and IDs must now also include a common barcode and security devices to prevent any tampering with or counterfeiting of the card, and must display a star in the upper right-hand corner, signifying that your identification has been approved by the TSA and your identity has been verified.

Immigrants and foreign nationals working in the United States are similarly worried about how the REAL ID Act may affect their abilities to live and work within the country. As the requirements for obtaining a new ID card are much more stringent than what some states currently employ, foreigners without legal proof of entry into the U.S. or without a Social Security number will be barred from obtaining a driver's license, drastically limiting their means of travel throughout the country, and possibly forcing them to return to their home country to renew an ID.

## List of endorsing organizations

21 Progress

Centro Latino

Cielo

Entre Hermanos

Lutheran Community Services Northwest

Colectiva Legal del Pueblo

Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center

Migrant Student Foundation

Bailadores de Bronce

Mari's Place

Washington State Family & Community Engagement Trust

Latino Community Fund

Progreso: Latino Progress Alliance

Southwest Washington League of United Latin American Citizens

LULAC Council 47013