



STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2006

From the President



Felix Ortiz

Welcome to the Spring issue of NHCSL's quarterly newsletter, *Strengthening Our Voices*. In this issue we have much news to share with you. As you know, NHCSL has embarked on several projects in the areas of health, education and immigration.

Most recently, together with other legislators, we participated at the various immigration marches and rallies held across the country. The immigration debate remains important to our constituency. You can read more about our participation on this page.

In the next few weeks NHCSL will host a series of meetings and forums on various public health issues. These gatherings are specifically designed for our legislators who will have the opportunity to hear from health practitioners, medical experts and policy experts involved in the various aspects of public health and how it impacts the Hispanic community.

The year will continue to be busy for our legislators – many are preparing for primaries and elections, while others are completing their terms. Nonetheless, our legislators are sponsoring key legislation that will help improve the quality of life for our communities.

Thank you again for your continued support and commitment to NHCSL.

Assemblyman Felix Ortiz (NY)



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NHCSL MAKES PRESENCE ON IMMIGRATION DEBATE

The topic dominating the news headlines and halls of Congress over the last few months was no doubt immigration. Playing a role in the ongoing debate, marches, rallies and media interviews were Hispanic state legislators from around the country to voice opposition to the “Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005” (HR-4437), sponsored by House Judiciary Chairman, Congressman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and Homeland Security Chairman, Congressman Peter King (R-NY). Earlier this month, the NHCSL Executive Committee adopted a resolution to condemn HR-4437.

Texas Senator Leticia Van de Putte, who participated in the March for Immigration Rights in San Antonio, which took place during the National Day of Action on Im-

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Representative Roberto Alonzo (TX) at Immigrant Rally March in Texas.

LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP

Immigration *Continued from page 1*

New Mexico In its 47th Legislature second session for 2006, New Mexico State Senator Bernadette Sanchez sponsored a “Joint Memorial requesting the New Mexico Health Policy Commission to study the importance of and the barriers to meeting the need for recruiting and retaining an adequate supply of bilingual behavioral health professionals in New Mexico. In the next half-century, the United States is expected to see a significant rise in its Hispanic and other ethnic cultures and populations. For more information visit <http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/legdetails.asp?Name=285>.

Arizona Representative Amanda Aguirre has introduced legislation to appropriate more than \$3.473 million in fiscal year 2006-07 to the Department of Public Safety (DPS) for the auto theft task force and gang intelligence team enforcement mission. The bill directs \$1.42 million to the continuation of the functions of the auto theft task force and \$2.053 million to the operations of the gang intelligence team enforcement mission. In a news release it states, the Arizona Vehicle Theft Task Force would work with the Yuma Police Department on an upcoming detail in an effort to recover stolen vehicles and apprehend the suspects in possession of those cars, according to DPS. In fiscal year 2005, the vehicle theft task force recovered 2,792 stolen vehicles with an estimated value of \$30.6 million, according to DPS.

Rhode Island State Senator Juan Pichardo who co-chairs the Predatory Lending Commission of Rhode Island, released the findings from a report from the Legislative Commission to Study Predatory Mortgage Lending Practices. The final report is the culmination of nine months of investigation, research, and analysis of predatory mortgage lending practices. “This Commission was created to protect families and individuals from irreparable financial damage caused by predatory lending practices, while also attempting to empower homeowners,” said Senator Pichardo. “We have dedicated the past nine months to providing recommendations that will continue to support home lending that builds wealth among our families and strengthens our communities.” The final report contains seven findings that outline initiatives and tested solutions to prevent predatory lending. The final report of the Legislative Commission to Study Predatory Mortgage Lending Practices is available on the website of the RI Attorney General. To view the report, go to www.riag.state.ri.us or www.rilin.state.ri.us/PredLending.pdf.

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The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) is the preeminent organization representing the interests of 300 Hispanic state legislators from all states, commonwealths, and territories of the United States. Founded in 1989 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)3, NHCSL is a catalyst and advocate for joint action on issues of common concern, such as health, education, immigration, homeownership and economic development to all segments of the Hispanic community. NHCSL also works to design and

implement policies and procedures that will impact the quality of life for Hispanic communities; serves as a forum for information exchange and member networking; an institute for leadership training; a liaison with sister U.S. Hispanic organizations; a promoter of public/private partnerships with business and labor; and a partner with Hispanic state and provincial legislators and their associations representing Central and South America.



Representative Roberto Alonzo (TX)

migrant Rights, said, “The controversial measure of HR 4437 has moved people across the country to demonstrate in support of the basic human rights of immigrants. Like those I marched along side, I cannot support an immigration system that turns people trying to better their lives into automatic felons.”

NHCSL President, Assemblyman Felix Ortiz (NY), Representative Minnie Gonzalez (CT), Representative Roberto Alonzo (TX), Representative Ben Miranda (AZ), and Representative Ryan Guillen (TX) were also among the legislators at the different marches and rallies. After more debate in Congress, Senators Mel Martinez (R-FLA) and Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) then proposed an immigration bill that, according to NHCSL President Ortiz, “does not cover all aspects to fully protect immigrants but it is a step in the right direction. Like most families, immigrants are hard working individuals who want a better life for themselves and their children.”

“We will continue to watch Congress on this issue. It will also be important to ensure that when measures are put in place, immigrants from all parts of the world are treated fairly and with dignity and respect,” said Ortiz. 🌐



Immigrant Rally March in Washington, DC

Strengthening Our Voices is made possible by





focus

health disparities by ensuring that our programs, activities, and initiatives meet the needs of those who are at highest risk, the nation's youth."

NHCSL entered into its second year of the Healthy States Initiative. The Healthy States Initiative is a partnership with The Council of State Governments (CSG), National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Through the Healthy States Initiative state legislators become more informed about public health issues, as well as innovative health trends and solutions that can impact their states.



Through its surveillance, research, funding, and evaluation activities, CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) plays a critical role in achieving CDC and HHS goals. Culturally appropriate school programs that address risk behaviors among youth, especially when coordinated with community efforts, could improve the health of populations at risk for health disparities, as well as the nation as a whole.

Now in this second year, NHCSL will collaborate with the CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH). NHCSL will focus on adolescent and school health issues as it relates to health disparities among school-aged youth, particularly in the areas of risk behaviors and health-related behaviors that are established during childhood and adolescence. According to the CDC, some the behaviors include lack of adequate physical activity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, sexual risk behaviors and poor asthma management.

From the Director of DASH Dr. Howell Wechsler, "The elimination of racial and ethnic health disparities will require a collaborative effort involving all segments of our society. The Division of Adolescent and School Health at CDC is committed to assisting the nation's education and health agencies and national education and health organizations in reducing and eliminating

disparities requires cooperation across silos, DASH has established a Task Force on Health Disparities Among School-Age Youth of Color that brings together representatives from state agencies and major national education and health organizations. The Task Force strategic approach to eliminating health disparities is three fold:

1. Raise awareness of the strategies that have been successful in reducing health disparities in disease prevention and health promotion programs and services.
2. Identify key issues that national public health agencies need to consider when creating program announcements and funding opportunities.
3. Improve the quality of existing resources, programs, and services to more effectively address the needs and priorities of communities of color.

For more information about the Healthy States Initiative visit www.nhcsl.org.

Legislative *Continued from page 2*

Maryland The Maryland Graduation Bill Public Schools: Graduation Rate Formula - Collecting, Maintaining, Analyzing, and Reporting (HB 71/SB 59), sponsored by Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez, passed the House and Senate. This bill marks the first step in the campaign, Closing the Education Achievement Gap by members of the NHCSL and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) to support the introduction of similar legislation in other states.

Currently, reported data is both inaccurate and misleading, and hides the appalling fact that in many school districts - with disproportionate numbers of poor and minority students - only about 50 percent of students graduate from high school. Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, testified in February before the Maryland House of Delegates' Ways and Means Committee in support of the bill. "The importance of this bill is that now legislators will be joining with governors to guarantee accurate measurement of how many high school students are really graduating.

With good data, states can better see where the problems are where precious education dollars should be spent," said Wise. The bill

(HB71), which would establish accurate and honest comparisons of graduation rates from high school to high school and district to district, was developed in collaboration with the Alliance for Excellent Education and other education organizations. On May 2, Maryland Governor Bob Ehrlich signed the bill into law. For more information visit: <http://mlis.state.md.us/2006rs/billfile/HB0071.htm> or <http://mlis.state.md.us/2006rs/billfile/SB0059.htm>



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