

National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities Policy Update July 2011

White House Hispanic Policy Conference

The White House organized the first ever White House Hispanic Policy Conference, held in Washington, DC on July 11th and 12th. Casa de Esperanza's Director of Public Policy, Rosie Hidalgo, was invited to participate in this important event. 160 Latin@ leaders from 25 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico joined over 100 Administration officials to discuss the impact of current policies on Latin@ communities and, more importantly, to strategize together on how best to move forward to improve outcomes and access for Latin@ communities. For more information, view the White House blog post at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/07/14/first-ever-white-house-hispanic-policy-conference-why-hispanics-are-critical-winning>

As stated on the White House blog, "It's undeniable. At more than 54 million strong, the most recent census numbers show that the Hispanic community is no longer found in a handful of states, but in every state across the country. As the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. it is critical to the future of our nation—our economy, our education system—that the Hispanic community thrives."

During the policy conference Rosie had an opportunity to raise a number of critical issues, including the negative impact of the Secure Communities program on victims of violence, issues of sexual exploitation in the workplace, the need for improved access to funding for Latin@ community-based organizations, the importance of improving enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which requires meaningful access to the courts and federally funded programs for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), better HUD enforcement of access to transitional housing for undocumented survivors, and the importance of addressing teen dating violence issues, among other things.

InSecure Communities - Increased Fear and Distrust Deters Immigrant Survivors from Calling Police

We continue to hear from advocates across the country that immigrant survivors are increasingly fearful to contact the police for help. Initiatives through the Department of Homeland Security, such as the 287(g) and Secure Communities programs, as well as state laws requiring local law enforcement to get involved in policing immigration status blur the lines between the role of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials and those of local law enforcement. This has a devastating impact on efforts to provide safety for victims and build the kind of trust and communication with local law enforcement that is critical to reduce crime and protect all communities.

This also causes fear among witnesses too afraid to come forward to cooperate with the police for fear of being questioned about their immigration status. This is often the case even if the victim or witness has authorized immigration status, since often there is fear of racial profiling or of calling the police to a home where there may be a number of individuals with mixed immigration status.

In communities where the duties of local law enforcement have become more closely intertwined with that of ICE, advocates report that many immigrant victims are not getting the help they are legally entitled to receive and increasingly crimes and abuse are going unreported, thereby hindering law enforcement's primary goal of keeping communities safe. Casa de Esperanza provided testimony at a hearing in the Minnesota House of Representatives, speaking out against legislative efforts to prohibit the noncooperation ordinance that

is currently in place in the Twin Cities. Essentially this bill would have prohibited cities and police departments from adopting community policing ordinances and policies designed to build trust with immigrant and refugee crime victims and witnesses. Although the bill passed in the House in Minnesota, fortunately it did not pass in the Senate. To view a copy of the testimony submitted by Casa de Esperanza, click the following link: <http://www.casadeesperanza.org/pdfs/ImmigrationOrdinanceLtrCdE.pdf>

Additionally, in response to growing concern about the negative effects of the Secure Communities program, which sends the fingerprints of all individuals arrested by local police (even if not charged or convicted of a crime) to the Department of Homeland Security, the governors of three states, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York, have recently announced that they will not participate in that program. However, it remains unclear whether the Department of Homeland Security will allow states to opt out.

The Department of Homeland Security recently released a memorandum on June 17, 2011 in which they acknowledge that ICE regularly hears concerns that in some cases police arrest multiple parties at the scene of alleged domestic violence and that when these individuals are booked and fingerprinted, it may result in the identification of a domestic violence victim to ICE. In the memorandum, ICE officials are "reminded to exercise all appropriate discretion on a case-by-case basis when making detention and enforcement decisions in the cases of victims of crime [and] witnesses to crime...". Of course, grave concerns remain that ICE is not in a position to determine who is a victim of crime when there has been a dual arrest in a domestic violence incident, which is all too common for immigrant survivors with limited English proficiency and very limited access to DV services. To view a copy of this memorandum click here: <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/domestic-violence.pdf>

If you are aware of cases in which immigrant survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault have been arrested by local law enforcement and subsequently detained by ICE, please notify Casa de Esperanza's Director of Public Policy at rhidalgo@casadeesperanza.org. We need to collect stories and hear from advocates about the impact of these policies in order to continue to advocate for better policies.

ABA Commission on Hispanic Legal Rights and Responsibilities

The ABA Commission on Hispanic Legal Rights and Responsibilities has held various regional hearings around the country. The testimony in these hearings is focused on pressing legal issues facing the Latino community and how these issues can be addressed and will serve to inform the development of ABA policy resolutions as well as the creation of a comprehensive report, which will provide recommendations for Congressional and Administration policy makers. Casa de Esperanza submitted written testimony for the record, in conjunction with the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence. To view a copy of the testimony, click the following link: <http://www.casadeesperanza.org/pdfs/ABAHispanicCommissionTestimony.pdf>

About the National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities:

The National Latin@ Network is led by Casa de Esperanza, a national Latina organization whose mission is to mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence. The National Latin@ Network builds on Casa de Esperanza's experience working in local communities to support families, end domestic violence, and increase meaningful access to services for Latina@s.