

2006 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

EDUCATION

Encourage the development of more programs to address the high drop out rate of Hispanic students in our K-12 schools. The problems, passages, and questions in the WASL exam need to be more reflective of our diverse student population and in addition need to include multiple measures as a requirement for graduation. Education is essential to the economic health, cultural diversity, civic vitality, and political well being of Washington state and the nation. Our state education system and all local educational agencies must respond accordingly with resources, programs, and policies that address the factors which impede Hispanic students to reach and gain a meaningful education.

Encourage bilingual college students to become teachers in Washington State. School districts face significant difficulties in recruiting, hiring and retaining sufficient bilingual teachers. According to OSPI, more than 90% of teachers and administrators are Caucasian, and in some school districts the Hispanic student population is over 50%. Bilingual teachers are crucial in improving the academic success of English Language Learners. CHA supports legislation that will give bilingual college and university student's incentive to become teachers while securing their commitment to work in Washington State.

Address barriers faced by English Language Learners in attaining the Certificate of Academic Achievement. Only 12% of 10th grade English Language Learners (ELL) students meet the WASL standard in mathematics and only 28% of ELL students meet the WASL standard in reading. School districts must work to address these disparities in WASL results and help to reduce the barriers faced by ELL students. Potential solutions may include extra individual help and instruction for ELL students who are identified as not meeting WASL standards, alternative assessments to the WASL for diligent ELL students and options for retaking the examination.

Encourage post-secondary institutions to bring their admission processes closer in line with recent US Supreme Court decisions. Since 1997, admission of Hispanic students at our state's higher education institutions has not kept up with our population growth. While the Hispanic population comprises almost 11% of the population in Washington State, Hispanic enrollment in the University of Washington's graduate and professional programs is less than 3%. Colleges and universities are becoming less and less diverse while the highest court in the land has declared that individualized consideration of race and ethnicity in university admissions is acceptable. Our state should follow the guidance of the Supreme Court and pass legislation that recognizes the importance of diversity in our institutions of higher education.

Support the DREAM ACT. Hundreds of thousands of children are brought to the United States by parents hoping to achieve the American Dream. These children have no recourse to adjust their immigration status and become contributing members of society. For those successful immigrant students who graduate from high school and seek to go to college and pursue a career, the federal DREAM ACT provides an avenue for accomplishing this as well as adjusting their immigration status. CHA recommends efforts by the legislators to support this important federal legislation.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Support legislation that addresses the ability of minority and women's business enterprises to access available resources. Funds shall be used to create jobs and more economic opportunities by providing additional resources to the community economic revitalization board's program. CHA also encourages the state investment board to invest in start-up and expanding business and to create economic development grant programs.

IMMIGRANT ISSUES

Encourage the State to allow Mexican nationals to use the Mexican Consular photo identification card for identification purposes. Mexican nationals in our state who may not have immigration documents should still have the ability to identify themselves before law enforcement, banks, and other venues as needed. The Matricula Consular would allow for proper identification and is already officially recognized in many cities in our state, including: Seattle, Tacoma, Yakima, Bellevue and Renton.

Discourage the local enforcement of immigration laws. Enforcing federal immigration law is the responsibility of INS, not of state and local agencies. A positive relationship between local law enforcement and immigrant communities benefit our community, however, positive relationships cannot exist when people are afraid to contact police because of fear that the police will inquire into their immigration status. State and local agencies should make clear to clients that they are not immigration agents and will not inquire into immigration status unless required by federal law.

HEALTH CARE

Encourage the state to improve affordable and accessible healthcare coverage for all Washington State residents. Changes in funding healthcare programs in Washington State, over the past three years, have had huge impacts on communities of color and low income families. Changes in Medicaid funding and the Basic Health program have made it more difficult for Hispanic children and adults to access healthcare coverage. These changes have increased non-insured rates among Latinos in our state. Almost one in three Hispanics go uninsured, compared to only one in ten Caucasians. The state should develop alternative funding programs for providing healthcare coverage for non-insured low income residents, so that they may access much needed healthcare services.

Encourage state agencies to provide certain public notices in languages other than English. Require state agencies to provide public notices regarding public health, safety or welfare in the language of the community being addressed. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) households in predominant LEP communities in Washington have the same right to be informed about these matters as English-speaking households. In order to be effective, notices as to placement of sex offender housing, emergency information about water and food safety, or disaster recovery for example, should be available to all people within the community.

Provide funding for a Hispanic/Latino Health Needs Assessment. This will help advance the Joint Select Committee on Health Disparities Report. This is the first step towards creating a Universal Hispanic Health Care program. Currently, most needs data is based on migrant health issues rather than the broader Hispanic community.

FARMWORKER ISSUES

Encourage the continued monitoring of Cholinesterase. CHA encourages refining the process of blood monitoring for handlers of pesticides containing the cholinesterase enzyme. Farm workers who thin crops are more likely to have detectable levels of pesticide residues in their homes than other farm workers. Their children are more likely to have detectable levels of pesticides in their urine. Farm workers who believe they have been exposed to pesticides are not likely to seek health care out of fear of retaliation, lack of trust in doctors to diagnose pesticide exposure, and costs associated with health care.

Increase allocation of Housing Trust Funds for Farm worker Housing. Many farm workers live in substandard housing due to the lack of affordable housing.