

# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES



# A LETTER FROM HF PRESIDENT

June 2026

Dear Friends,

When we released the first chapter of Hispanic Federation's 2025-2026 Federal Policy Agenda, the full scope of policies that the new Presidential Administration and the 119th Congress would pursue were only just taking shape. Now, a year later, the salience of this moment is clear. Latino and immigrant communities are suffering and continue to be threatened in ways like never before, storied nonprofits and civil rights organizations have had their funding slashed and even faced direct attacks from Administration officials, and hard-won victories for equity, from the ballot to the boardroom, are being undermined. New legislation will strip hundreds of billions of dollars from vulnerable communities each year for the rest of the decade, while immigrants are subjected to decreased eligibility, increased fines, and aggressive criminalization.

In the face of these trials, Hispanic Federation is committed to continuing to serve Latino, immigrant, and vulnerable communities across the nation. We are proud to once again host our Encuentro Nacional, bringing together 150 members of our nationwide network of community-based organizations in Washington D.C. to advocate for the types of federal actions and policies that will provide real solutions for the problems facing our country.

We knew that navigating this moment would require national policies that were nuanced and pragmatic yet encompassing of the multifaceted situation facing Latino communities. Simultaneously, we were committed to policies tethered to the mission-driven values that have always lain at the heart of community-based nonprofits. Hispanic causes are becoming more quintessentially national by the day. Latinos are one-fifth of the U.S. population: *Latino communities are American communities, and American communities are Latino communities.*

While some issues are more urgent for the Latino households than others, Hispanic Federation is committed working on policy that reflects the manifold interests and needs of the Latino community. That is why we aim to provide a comprehensive agenda that addresses both the needs of our community and our mission. The challenges and opportunities before the Latino community are shaped by our history — histories of creativity and determination, and histories of neglect and discrimination — but also the dreams and realities of today. Our recommendations span immigration, health care, economic development, democracy and civil rights, environmental justice, education, housing, and the still-pressing challenge of justice for Puerto Rico.

In preparing these recommendations, the Hispanic Federation team turned to experts of all sorts. Our recommendations draw not only on the latest scientific and sociological scholarship but also the expertise of our network of nonprofit leaders about the people they serve, their needs and their perspectives. Some of the ensuing recommendations are time-tested, like pathways to stability for DREAMers and ensuring that disaster aid reaches those most in need. Others are novel and urgent, like support for research into individualized pollution impacts and tailored implementation of workforce education programs. The result is an agenda that captures both emergent and urgent needs through policy recommendations that work for the people themselves. If followed, they will support prosperity for not only Latinos, but all Americans in the years to come.



Frankie Miranda  
President and CEO

# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

## INTRODUCTION

The 119th Congress and the new Administration have triggered dynamic and often forceful debates on the direction of national policy. From economic opportunity to immigration to health care, these debates are poised to trigger drastic reorganizations of American life in ways that are likely to influence Latino communities in particular. At a time when Latino issues are front and center, Hispanic Federation's Federal Policy Priorities provides an opportunity for decision-makers across the federal landscape to hear directly from the Latino community regarding their values and policy priorities. The 2026 Federal Policy Priorities will focus on issues important to Latinos across the United States, with standalone chapters, each addressing a specific challenge faced by the Latino community.

As the nation's premier Latino nonprofit membership organization, Hispanic Federation works directly with its network of more than 840 organizations across 43 states and territories, including Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia and the US Virgin Islands; the policy proposals outlined in this series are reflective of this depth of community experience.

Hispanic Federation's greatest strength lies in its deep roots in Latino communities and relationships with grassroots leaders, nonprofits, public officials, policymakers, media, small business owners, and private sector leaders. Our policy and advocacy work aims to advance Latino opportunity and equity by focusing on three pillars: Civil Rights, Justice, Equity and Empowerment. Our methodology in driving policy change is to work with community on the ground to identify inequities and develop solutions. Latinos are a dynamic and diverse population that is actively reshaping the course of this nation. Latinos/Latinas/Latines/Latinx can be Black, White, Indigenous, Asian, Arab and/or Mestizo, among other ethnicities. As such, the recommendations embedded within our summer policy series are wide-ranging, covering everything from civil rights to housing, and outline proposals grounded in research and experience to support communities from rural farm workers to urban businessowners and everyone in between.

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# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Immigration

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand; A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame; Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name; Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand; Glows world-wide welcome”  
– “The New Colossus”, Emma Lazarus.<sup>1</sup>*

Immigrants are essential to America's history and its future prosperity. While federal actions may have moved away from a humanitarian, immigrant-focused approach toward punitive enforcement, the devastating impacts of these enforcement actions only reveals how vital immigrants are to American communities of all stripes. Our nation's millions of immigrants are essential to the fabric of our economy and society, and they deserve a federal policy environment that works. Hispanic Federation believes in working on incremental, long-term solutions that address the ongoing reality of migration from Latin America, instead of problematic deportations, detentions, and punitive border security.

Immigrants and their neighbors today face two core challenges. Most pressingly is a federal government which has been aggressively weaponized against immigrants, their families, and their homes, from benefits cuts aimed squarely at mixed-status families to community deportation sweeps and workforce disruption. Simultaneously though, longstanding bureaucratic hurdles continue to stymie immigrant populations; processing backlogs persist, pathways to status and citizenship continue to be denied to long-tenured groups like DREAMERS and Temporary Protected Status recipients,

**HF BELIEVES IN WORKING ON INCREMENTAL, LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS THAT ADDRESS THE ONGOING REALITY OF MIGRATION FROM LATIN AMERICA, INSTEAD OF PROBLEMATIC DEPORTATIONS, DETENTIONS, AND PUNITIVE BORDER SECURITY.**

For decades, HF has been at the forefront of the fight for immigration reform, working with state and federal legislators, business leaders, and faith- and community-based organizations to explain the urgent need for and benefits of fixing a system that currently serves neither immigrants nor the nation. Our early efforts focused on local advocacy and collaborations with our member agencies to develop citizenship campaigns. Today, Hispanic Federation is and will continue to be a national provider of immigrant integration and essential direct services as well as a national advocate for immigration policy that ensures justice, equity, and economic stability.

## SITUATION REPORT

The U.S. immigration system is broken and has been for decades. Immigrants comprise approximately 14% of the US population; nearly 50m Americans were born outside the US.<sup>2</sup> There are an estimated 8 to 16 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. who are productive, tax-paying individuals, have developed roots in U.S. communities, and who are raising families with children — many of whom are American citizens. But the current political climate, anti-immigrant policies, and rhetoric has increased the fear of deportation within these communities, pushing them further into the shadows. Only Congress can fix the problem, but partisan politics regularly gets in the way of workable and humane solutions that keep immigrant families together, provide pathways to regularize immigration status, and help U.S. communities prosper.

**THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 8 TO 16 MILLION UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. WHO ARE PRODUCTIVE, TAX-PAYING INDIVIDUALS, HAVE DEVELOPED ROOTS IN U.S. COMMUNITIES, AND WHO ARE RAISING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN – MANY OF WHOM ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS.**

The last broad spectrum immigration reform bill that offered regularization for undocumented immigrants was signed into law under President Reagan in 1986, with an estimated three million individuals eventually benefitting from the program.<sup>3</sup> Since 1986, legislative progress on immigration reform has ground to a halt. The IIRIRA, signed by President Clinton as part of 1997's omnibus legislation, implemented a number of anti-immigrant statutes that have undermined Constitutional protections while rendering the entire immigration system more cumbersome for both prospective immigrants and federal administrators. Then, in 2010, a version of the DREAM Act narrowly failed to pass the Senate, despite bipartisan support and closely-tailored requirements.<sup>4</sup> A sweeping reform package proposed in 2013 went nowhere.<sup>5</sup>

Instead, the first major piece of immigration legislation that Congress passed in years was 2025's Laken Riley Act. Far from addressing systemic challenges in America's immigration system, this legislation effectively tramples on Constitutional rights to due process in order to accelerate criminalization of immigrants. This legislation highlights the stark choice facing US immigration policy between incrimination and incorporation, but its immediate impacts pale in comparison with those of the federal government's regime of mass deportation initiated in 2025. In a short span, nearly half a million people have been uprooted from their communities and forcibly removed. A horrifying number of those subjected to this mass deportation agenda have held no criminal record, were prospective refugees from violence and persecution, were theoretically protected from removal, have U.S. citizen families, were U.S. citizens themselves, or were even children — with all increasingly afforded paper-thin due process considerations and subjected to widening discriminatory practices.

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Federal Immigration Oversight

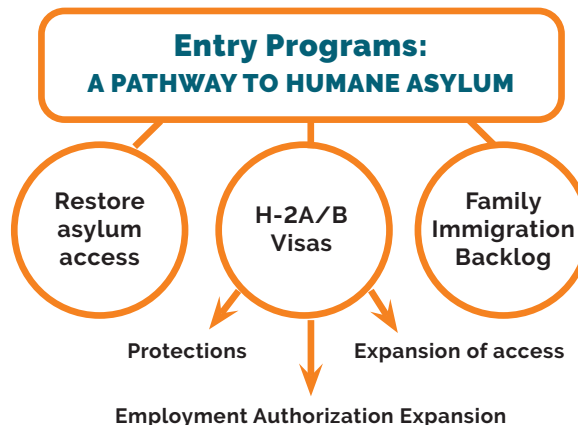
- **Stop Mass Deportations:** The Trump administration has proven itself fiercely committed to an inhumane and self-destructive policy of mass detention and deportation. Longstanding protections like TPS have been revoked, and the administration is prioritizing high profile, mass raids over targeted enforcement to advance public safety. Executive orders have called for deportation on ideological grounds<sup>6</sup> and even a fast track to the death penalty for immigrants.<sup>7</sup> These measures are pointlessly cruel and ultimately undermine the national interest. Moreover, the reckless and noxious expansion of immigration enforcement has rapidly ensnared all

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classes of immigrants — from new arrivals to long-term DACA recipients to lawful permanent residents (LPR's) on the very cusp of obtaining citizenship. In some cases, even those who are already US citizens have been entangled in an increasingly indiscriminate mass deportation agenda. This expanding dragnet is inflicting deleterious terror on American communities and tearing mixed status families apart. **Hispanic Federation demands mass deportations be halted immediately and due process be restored to the US deportation system.**

- **Reform of Enforcement and Detention Protocols:** Indiscriminate, dragnet enforcement operations conducted by the federal government since 2025 have undermined businesses,<sup>8</sup> hollowed out schools,<sup>9</sup> disrupted public health programs,<sup>10</sup> and torn families apart — all while leading directly to the deaths of dozens of people, including U.S. citizens.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the last year has seen new records broken in fatalities among those held in immigration detention, all while the number of those held without criminal convictions has risen 25-fold. These developments have been exacerbated by the operational protocols of federal enforcement agents and their virtual unaccountability. **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to impose meaningful guardrails on federal immigration enforcement operations, including standard protocols for clearly visible identification of federal agents, ending roving patrols outside of their jurisdiction, restoring pre-arrest approval and judicial warrant requirements, and accountability measures for violations of protocol, including disciplinary actions and review panels.**
- **Guarantee Due Process:** The rapid escalation of federal enforcement operations has encroached heavily on constitutional rights, perhaps none more so than the right to due process under the law. Since early 2025, federal judges have ruled against the administration in more than 10,000 cases, repeatedly finding that mandatory detention policies were objectionable, or that federal officials conducted outright due process violations.<sup>12</sup> These violations have become distressingly common ever since a Supreme Court ruling permitted federal agents to conduct what amounts to racial profiling in immigration stops.<sup>13</sup> These actions are not only deleterious to communities on the ground but indeed detrimental to our entire constitutional order. **Hispanic Federation demands Congress take steps to restore basic constitutional rights to due process for those entailed within federal enforcement operations, including timely legal representation, fair hearings, vetted review processes to regularly assess detention legality and necessity, and adequate funding to address the continuous backlog at USCIS.**
- **Enhance Transparency and Oversight:** These corrosive enforcement operations have been enabled by a relative collapse of oversight and accountability mechanisms. The functional elimination of key watchdog positions in 2025, including the Office of Immigration Detention Ombudsman, has limited internal executive branch oversight of the Department of Homeland Security and other immigration-facing departments.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously, federal officials have been aggressive in challenging state and local policies designed to implement oversight guardrails. <sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, federal lawmakers have largely refused to take up measures designed to restore, let alone expand, previous guardrails, and indeed have embraced legislation effectively decreasing Congressional oversight of immigration enforcement. **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to reinstate and expand Congressional oversight including hearings, reporting, and investigative authority, and to take steps to empower external, independent oversight and accountability for federal immigration operations.**
- **Supporting a Humanitarian, Constructive Immigration System:** Since 2025, the federal government has increasingly taken steps to provide exorbitant funding to dragnet immigration enforcement while reducing eligibility for safety net programs with demonstrated economic and social benefits. The funneling of tens of billions of dollars from nutrition aid and health care to economically destructive enforcement operations is both heinous and quixotic. **Hispanic Federation implores Congress redirect funding for sweeping enforcement operations toward increasing the number of immigration judges, toward community-based integration programs, legal aid services, and broader public benefits.**

## Entry Programs



- Restore Asylum Access:** Asylum is a statutory right by US and international law. While the CBP-One app was riddled with counterintuitive challenges, its removal closed the primary avenue for proactive asylum. First and foremost, a pathway to humane asylum must be reinstated, whether via an app or other means. In the event that an app is reinstated, it must be reformed to reduce geographical limitations of appointments and mitigate the unpredictable lottery nature of those appointments to ensure that it does not become an unintentional avenue to the creation of 'remain-in-Mexico'-style policies.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, USCIS must re-implement some form of analogue asylum processing for those outside the US to support those fleeing persecution who lack access to and familiarity with modern mobile design. **Hispanic Federation demands a just and accessible system for all asylum seekers.**
- Family Immigration Backlog:** The passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952<sup>17</sup> laid the foundation for the current immigration preferencing system, including the ability for US citizens and lawful permanent residents to facilitate the immigration of their close family members.<sup>18</sup> However, inadequate funding for both staffing and vital infrastructure upgrades has left USCIS unable to satisfy the promise of familial immigration embedded within the INA. As a result, many close family members, including children of US citizens, face a backlog of applications stretching into the millions.<sup>19</sup> To address this backlog, **Hispanic Federation demands that Congress increase funding for USCIS with specific requirements that that funding be used to ameliorate the family immigration backlog. Likewise, we demand Congress explore and implement proposals to enable the recapture of visas to support the reunification of families along terms already provided for by US law.**
- H-2A/B Visas**

  - Protections:** H2-A and B visa workers are essential to vital sectors of our economy, ranging from agriculture to construction to supply-chain logistics. These visa workers are nominally protected by an array of Department of Labor statutes covered by OSHA, Employment and Training, the Employment Standards Administration and others. However, recent lawsuits and journalistic work have demonstrated that existing protections for migrant workers are seldom enforced and often met with illegal retaliation.<sup>20</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands the expansion of inspection and enforcement efforts for legally mandated protections for H-2A/B visa holders, including migrant housing.**
  - Expansion of access:** To address the growing need for specialized labor, HF calls for the expansion of H-2A and B visa caps, as well as alterations in formula and visa determinations to allow employers to alter visa allocations in closer proximity to visa procural so that employers can feel confident that they will be able to balance their requests with changing business needs. While reactive legal response efforts can help plug the gap, only proactive federal enforcement coupled with positive incentives for employers can simultaneously protect workers and connect them with the labor markets most in need of their talents. Likewise, HF urges Congress to explore possibilities to allow visa workers to change jobs while retaining their current visas to further support flexibility in the U.S. labor supply.<sup>21</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands an expanded visa system that prioritizes worker rights and flexibility for evolving workforce demands.**

- **Employment Authorization Expansion:** The United States needs immigrant workers to perform crucial jobs from home health to home construction, and immigrants need access to employment authorization to secure the right to dignified, legal, sustainable employment. In the summer of 2024, nearly 1,000,000 affirmative asylum cases were pending in excess of statutory maximum waiting periods.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, almost 1.5m employment authorization documents (EAD's, aka, work permits) awaited processing,<sup>23</sup> leaving an expansive workforce idle. These rampant delays ensure that even existing pathways within the immigration system are not able to operate as intended. **Hispanic Federation demands the expansion and expediting of work authorizations through increased funding to address administrative backlogs and statutory expansions of the population eligible for EADs.**

## STATUS AND DOCUMENTATION

- **DACA:** The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), policy has enjoyed broad public support for years.<sup>24</sup> There are approximately 500,000 DACA recipients, and according to the White House, over 300,000 DACA recipients work in essential positions, including classrooms, healthcare workers, and food supply.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, DACA recipients remain haunted by the specter of uncertainty, as an entangled complex of federal regulations, judicial rulings, and legislative nods all combine to create a kaleidoscopic policy landscape. Indeed, recent months have shown just how vulnerable DACA recipients can be to delays, disruption, and even deportation. In turn, **Hispanic Federation demands the passage of legislation in keeping with the principles and structure of the DREAM Act.**
- **TPS:** Likewise, for years, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) has given refugees safe harbor in the United States from turbulence in their home countries at the discretion of the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>26</sup> The Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimated the 2024 TPS population at over 850,000 individuals from states ranging from Nepal to Venezuela, though that number predated the recent revocation of TPS from hundreds of thousands.<sup>27</sup> A 2019 estimate held that TPS recipients paid almost \$5bn in taxes, a number that has certainly increased as the number of recipients has expanded.<sup>28</sup> The program is not only morally righteous in shielding those facing the alternative of deportation to dangerous conditions, but also economically beneficial to the United States. Now, however, TPS designations across the country are under threat, with many removed and others dependent upon federal court rulings. Even as courts deliberate, TPS populations are increasingly targeted for detention and deportation.<sup>29</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands consistent designation within the TPS program as well as pathways to citizenship for both groups via terms akin to those included in the American Dream and Promise Act.**
- **Driver's licenses:** Nineteen states plus the District of Columbia permit undocumented immigrants to access driver's licenses in some form or fashion. These states, ranging from Utah to Hawaii have acted out of a combined recognition that mobility is a prerequisite for equitable public safety and effective engagement in local economies, particularly as roughly three-fourths of the US population lack access to a typical job by public transit within a 90-minute trip.<sup>30</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands national legislation regarding access to and reciprocity of driver's licenses for all residents, regardless of status.**
- **REAL ID Act Implementation:** Long-delayed, the implementation of the REAL ID Act has arrived, bringing with it chaos and uncertainty for immigrant travelers.<sup>31</sup> The fears and delays caused by the Act's provisions are enough of an imposition on immigrants and citizens who are able to provide the documentation required by the act to warrant skepticism. However, REAL ID's provisions effectively bar undocumented individuals from air travel without possession of an international passport. Coupled with recent actions by the executive branch — including the implementation of an alien registration requirement,

and the apprehension, detention, and removal of non-criminal undocumented immigrants — undocumented immigrants risk exposure at airports if traveling with a foreign passport. In turn, its provisions are not only cumbersome but questionably Constitutional in light of SCOTUS verified right to freedom of movement regardless of immigration status.<sup>32</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands that the TSA submit new regulations providing for alternative modes of travel verification to safeguard the rights to travel and privacy for all Americans, irrespective of immigration status.**

## Welfare

- **Sanctuary Policies:** Sanctuary policies have proven effective at bolstering public health, safety, and economic outcomes in implementing jurisdictions because these policies enable immigrant communities to live and work without fear of removal. Likewise, these policies free local law enforcement to uphold state and local statutes without the complication and costs of undertaking federal enforcement obligations. **Hispanic Federation demands lawmakers oppose any bills or policies which seek to interfere with state and local sanctuary policies, including those advancing an ill-advised and questionably unconstitutional sidestepping of tenth amendment rights.**
- **Healthcare obligations for migrants:** Immigrants — especially Latinos — suffer from a greater incidence of negative health outcomes and lower standards of care than do native born Americans.<sup>33</sup> We were heartened by the recent federal expansion of access to the ACA marketplace for DACA recipients, and encourage Congress to pass legislation reversing its sudden revocation, thereby codifying that right of access. Expanding access to healthcare for immigrant populations is not only the ethical decision, but will also ensure that the U.S.'s fastest growing workforce will remain healthy and on the job. **Hispanic Federation demands the expansion of healthcare access to immigrant populations.**
- **Social program access:** Despite years of effective work to improve the gap, the poverty rate in the U.S. immigrant community remains 15% higher than among non-immigrants.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, mixed-status families remain almost 40% more likely to experience poverty than native-born residents.<sup>35</sup> Immigrant communities in turn are more vulnerable not only to poverty, but also to concomitant food insecurity.<sup>36</sup> However, despite paying billions annually in taxes, immigrants remain ineligible for most social programs. **Hispanic Federation demands the expansion of social services like counseling, healthcare, student aid, and disaster aid to all, irrespective of citizenship status, in recognition of the essential role immigrants play in local economies as workers, taxpayers, and community members.**

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### Entry Programs

- 80 percent of Americans live in counties that lost population over the past decade; local officials will increasingly feel the pinch of dwindling workforces. Shrinking tax bases have made it harder for government budgets to support essential services, such as infrastructure and public schools.
- Similarly, rural demographic analysis shows that while rural counties have faced a natural population decrease of over 100,000 since the pandemic, immigration offsets those decreases. Without immigration, over 50% of rural America would instead have faced population declines.<sup>37</sup>
- The U.S. economy, particularly in rural areas, simply will not be able to thrive without the critical immigrant labor force.

- Likewise, the economic contribution of immigrants, who pay taxes, including Social Security payroll taxes without eligibility for federal entitlements, is helping ensure current and future retirees are receiving their full benefits.
- Across several categories, the family immigration backlog extends over a decade.<sup>38</sup>
- Undocumented immigrants paid nearly \$100 billion in taxes in 2022, while being barred from receiving social benefit from many of the programs they were supporting.<sup>39</sup>
- Anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination has been increasing across the world, fueling a growing epidemic of displaced people. In turn, many seek the relative stability and support of the United States, though journalistic reporting affirms that many have struggled to access asylum,<sup>40</sup> even during periods in which facilitating asylum for those fleeing anti-LGBTQ persecution was an administration priority.<sup>41</sup>
- As of 2021, there were over 1.2m LGBTQ+ immigrants in the United States, according to research from UCLA's Williams Institute. Of these, approximately 50% were Latine.<sup>42</sup>
  - Furthermore, over 100,000 same-sex couples in the US were estimated to include at least one immigrant partner, 18,000 of whom had at least one child.<sup>43</sup>

### Status and Documentation

- Hispanic Federation was proud to support over 200 family applicants to the Keeping Families Together program during its short tenure.<sup>44</sup> This program sensibly allowed undocumented children and spouses without criminal histories who had been consistently present in the United States for 10+ years to apply to adjust their status while remaining with their families.
- Hispanic Federation has aided thousands of TPS-recipients with legal navigation and service access, informing our recommendation for TPS holders.
- Deportations deprive children of care and contribute to developmental delays.<sup>45</sup>
- Unsurprisingly, one study has found that increasing the frequency of immigration enforcement in an area decreases housing stability among Latino households.<sup>46</sup>
- While the current Administration has defended mass deportation as crime reduction, multi-approach meta-analyses like those conducted by Ousey and Kubrin (2018) have shown there to either be no causal or even a negative correlation between immigration and crime, suggesting that mass deportation policies are if anything only likely to *increase* local crime.<sup>47</sup>
- Research suggests that programs expanding immigrants' access to the traditional labor market are not only beneficial for local economies, but also reduce local crime rates.<sup>48</sup>
- Since 2021, HF programs have invested \$15m in immigrant welcome and legal services, supporting community investment and integration. Hispanic Federation's culturally competent, linguistically relevant Know Your Rights materials have reached over 6m people, ensuring that Americans — new and established — are appropriately apprised of our hard-won Constitutional rights.

## Welfare

- Research shows that healthcare access is harshly proscribed for migrants, with the greatest limitations occurring post-immigration.<sup>49</sup>
- Hispanic Federation's own work with visa-holding farm and food workers in North Carolina confirms that individuals are often forced into illegal inadequate housing, marked by moldy sheets, cramped quarters, and dangerous pathogen exposure, aligning with prior research on dangerous, unhealthy conditions facing such workers.<sup>50</sup>
- Compliance with anti-Sanctuary city laws can take resources away from local law enforcement and other public safety institutions. Indeed, in 2017 the Fraternal Order of Police sent a letter to Congressional leadership stating their opposition to any bill that could see federal funds for local police departments rescinded for failing to comply with immigration law.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, many counties across the political spectrum have sanctuary policies to preserve limited policing resources.<sup>52</sup>
  - Likewise, in May 2025, the National Sheriff's Association opposed the unilateral, punitive designation by DHS of 'sanctuary jurisdictions' as "violat[ing] the core principles of trust, cooperation, and partnership with fellow law enforcement," while critiquing the absence of a "legitimate [law enforcement] reason."<sup>53</sup>
- Meta studies have suggested that sanctuary policies either have zero relationship on crime rate, or perhaps have a negative relation — that is, sanctuary policies may reduce crime rates.<sup>54</sup>
- One study has suggested that individual Latina expectant mothers seek prenatal care later and with weaker healthcare outcomes in non-sanctuary jurisdictions.<sup>55</sup>
  - Another study comparing birth outcomes across North Carolina jurisdictions found a connection between immigration policies and birth weight, finding that the implementation of a Sec. 287(g) agreement was correlated with a decrease in birth weight of newborns to foreign-born, lower education parents and increased "small-for-gestational-age" birth percentages by 2.29%.<sup>56</sup>
- One study from 2019 found that implementing Sec. 287(g) agreements contributed to a 10% decline in Latino student enrollment in public schools,<sup>57</sup> while another found that the programs lead to an increase in chronic absenteeism, thereby reducing engagement, even among students who remain enrolled.<sup>58</sup>
- Recent efforts to close health care access, coverage, and affordability gaps among immigrant communities, including New York's excluded workers fund and Hispanic Federation's programmatic work connecting immigrant communities to healthcare and counseling services in states like New York, Florida, and Connecticut, have all increased effective medical treatments among underserved communities.<sup>59</sup>

### CONCLUSION

America's success in the 21st century hinges upon our ability to implement immigration policies that prioritize family unification, access to visas and documentation, and the creation of economic opportunities. Our nation's infrastructure relies upon immigrant labor; our farm and food sectors are powered by migrant workers; our classrooms and campuses are home to innovative immigrant perspectives, and our communities are built on relationships between Americans old and new. For decades, a stagnant, haphazard, and punitive immigration system has undermined American economies, communities, and families. It is imperative that Congress take steps to modernize the American immigration system, restoring stability, and humanity to American immigration policy.

Immigrant communities are far from a monolith, and solutions to American immigration challenges require multifaceted, disaggregated solutions. Entry programs, including for asylum and migrant labor, must be preserved, codified, and expanded to ensure that American labor and statutory requirements are met. Likewise, it is beyond time that pathways to documentation and naturalization be augmented to ensure that millions of Americans who have built lives in this country for years and even decades can enjoy the same security and opportunities as any other American. Finally, the American social safety net must be improved to better support the needs of immigrants old and new, both through expansion of eligibility and access. These measures may be challenging, but are eminently achievable, and doing so would facilitate another century of American prosperity.

## Endnotes

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# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Democracy and Civil Rights

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“We the people in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”*

That sentence serves as the preamble and mission statement to the U.S. Constitution. It is enshrined on parchment, in textbooks, and in national memory. Its promises are a statement of purpose for our nation that have captured the imagination of generations. The revolutionary promise of American Independence was that a government anchored in popular sovereignty and representative principles would empower each of its inhabitants to pursue their hopes, dreams, and ambitions. The subsequent belief that such a society could not merely only endure but thrive has become known as the American Experiment. These ideals have inspired millions over centuries to come to the United States to create new lives. While often forgotten, Latinos have been essential to this vision throughout American history, fighting for rights, freedom, and fueling prosperity at each step along the road. Their journeys and experiences, then and now, fuel Hispanic Federation's commitment to democracy and civil rights.

The pursuit of civil rights is essential to the American Experiment, encapsulated in the phrase “a more perfect union.” From John Adams and Frederick Douglas to Cesar Chavez and Lupe Anguiano, the American story has been written by those who dreamed of a world better than their own and invested those hopes into the United States. Each expansion of civil rights, from voting to business to marriage, has been a hard won but vital step in expanding the American Dream beyond those privileged few who initially ratified the Constitution. This work remains incomplete however, with lingering inequities in ballot access, data representation, and civil rights, to say nothing of the inequitable treatment of American citizens living in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.

**FROM JOHN ADAMS AND FREDERICK DOUGLAS TO CESAR CHAVEZ AND LUPE ANGUIANO, THE AMERICAN STORY HAS BEEN WRITTEN BY THOSE WHO DREAMED OF A WORLD BETTER THAN THEIR OWN AND INVESTED THOSE HOPES INTO THE UNITED STATES.**

Since its founding, Hispanic Federation has underscored the importance of civic engagement in our mission to advance and empower the Latino community in the United States. That's why we have registered millions of Latino voters since 1990 while providing crucial nonpartisan information on how elections impact our communities in a culturally competent way. As the federal government proceeds through a new year, a new Congress, and a new administration, Hispanic Federation is eager to collaborate with decisionmakers to increase civic participation and grow civil rights for all in our pursuit of a more perfect union.

## SITUATION REPORT

The Latino community is rapidly approaching 20% of the U.S. population and comprises almost 25% of the adolescent population. Nevertheless, Latinos face persistent challenges to their civil rights, including restricted civic access, inadequate electoral and demographically proportionate representation, unequal access to quality education and health services, threats to public safety, and so much more. Over the three elections from 2018 to 2022, 47% of eligible Latino voters sat out, compared to 24% of white eligible voters.<sup>1</sup> In the 2024 election, only 50.6% of eligible Latino voters cast a ballot while 70.5% of non-Hispanic white voters cast a ballot in that same election.<sup>2</sup> While Hispanic voting rates remain on a gradually upward trajectory, both voting and registration rates among eligible Latinos remain significantly below those of all other racial and ethnic groups tracked by the Census.<sup>3</sup> These statistics illustrate the vibrant potential for growth in Latino civic engagement.

Likewise, while the Latino population comprises some 13% of the eligible electorate, and roughly 11% of the electorate in 2020, Latinos themselves were only roughly 1% of federal, state, and local elected officials.<sup>4</sup> Racially-discriminatory gerrymandering, of course, is and has been illegal since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965,<sup>5</sup> while the courts have held that the Fifteenth Amendment also prohibits racially discriminatory districting.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, Latino voters remain underrepresented in the halls of power. Moreover, civil rights across the board are facing a new era of uncertainty as novel interpretations of Constitutional protections collide with long-established norms.

It is therefore crucial at this juncture that policymakers reinvest in civil rights that ensure liberties essential to our democratic republic remain unimpeded, including voting rights, protection from discrimination, and effective representation. Threats old and new, from the use of discriminatory algorithms to criminal activity, present disproportionate challenges to the growing Latino community in the United States. Meanwhile, tools like the census and traditional law enforcement are falling behind in the face of novel, decentralized 21<sup>st</sup> century problems. Hispanic Federation proposes a range of measures, from affirmative data equity to democratic modernization to ensure that the foundational rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will continue to flourish in the new American century.

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Voting and Civic Engagement

- **Voter Registration:** Successful participation in our democratic republic begins with lawful and equitable access to voter registration. Hispanic Federation is unequivocally committed to ensuring that all eligible voters are afforded every opportunity to exercise their patriotic franchise. Congress should provide pilot and transitional funding to states seeking to implement automatic voter registration without impinging upon states' constitutional authority to determine the manner of their own elections, according to researched best practices.<sup>7</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to support safe and secure automatic voter registration.**
- **Voting Roll Maintenance:** Voter roll purges have increasingly targeted Latino communities across the United States.<sup>8</sup> Recent practices have tended to be untransparent, sudden, and overly aggressive, even to the point of removing citizens who routinely vote.<sup>9</sup> Many of these purges have been ruled unlawful by federal judges. It is therefore incumbent upon the federal government to provide guidelines for fair practices by which illegal voter purges may be prevented, ensuring that every eligible, registered voter is allowed to cast their ballot. **Hispanic Federation demands that Congress take steps to prevent unlawful voter purges.**
- **Early and Mail-In Voting:** According to the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), nearly thirty percent of ballots cast in 2024 were submitted by mail.<sup>10</sup> Independent research has illustrated three key facts about expansion of voting modes. The first is that approaches like universal vote-by-mail are effective at increasing voting rates.<sup>11</sup> The second is that expanded voting methods does not appear to produce a partisan advantage or to disproportionately favor age groups.<sup>12</sup> The third is that these modes are safe, reliable, and secure.<sup>13</sup> As states like New York and Connecticut have made such measures permanent with advocacy from Hispanic Federation and our partners, they have born the fruits of increased voter engagement: more representative government and greater cooperation between residents and elected officials. **HF encourages the federal government to maintain mail-in, absentee, and early voting, and to support those states exploring such franchise expansions.**
- **Election Integrity:** Americans have a right to secure elections and ballot procedures they can trust. However, many proposed measures like the SAVE Act and the Election Integrity Act will only undermine ballot access without addressing meaningful electoral challenges. Therefore, **Hispanic Federation implores Congress to reject unnecessary and burdensome new legislation and instead provide resources for state and local election officials to focus on enforcing current laws that have proven effective at preventing election fraud for generations.**
- **Protection from Gerrymandering:** The American public is largely united in opposing districting practices that permit elected officials to choose their voters, rather than voters choosing their representatives.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, partisan gerrymandering continues to be widespread, with some states outright defying voter-led ballot initiatives to limit partisan gerrymandering or implement independent, nonpartisan redistricting committees.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, American political alignment ensures that partisan gerrymandering remains hopelessly entangled with illegal racial gerrymandering.<sup>16</sup> The nation must move to a uniform, independent, nonpartisan districting standard to limit potential abuses and safeguard the integrity of American elections. **Hispanic Federation urges the federal government to take steps to ensure voters are protected from gerrymandering, including by expanding Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.**

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- **Modern Voting Rights Legislation:** Contemporary data analytic tools have made it more important than ever to update voting protections. It has become increasingly possible for actors of any partisan persuasion to adopt voting practices that marginally penalize or reward certain voting patterns or demographics. In turn, judiciary oversight of voting practices must be restored in ways that delimit possible abuses by those of any political party. New tests for voting rights consideration outlined under *Shelby Co. v Holder* have clarified the judicial limitations to current voting rights legislation. Consequently, **Hispanic Federation ardently recommends Congress pass new legislation that reinvigorates and strengthens the protections provided by the Voting Rights Act.**
- **Voting and Citizenship:** Hispanic Federation ardently opposes recently introduced legislation and executive actions to require prospective voters to provide documentation of citizenship before registering to vote. For more than a century, noncitizens have been expressly barred from voting in federal elections. Furthermore, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996 codified doing so as a federal crime. Recently proposed measures like the SAVE Act would impose an unfunded mandate making it harder for U.S. citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Voters of color, married women, and rural voters would all be disproportionately barred from voting under these requirements.<sup>17</sup> **Hispanic Federation implores legislators to reject unnecessary and costly efforts to restrict voting access from legitimate voters.**
- **Birthright Citizenship:** The Fourteenth Amendment enshrined birthright citizenship as the law of the land.<sup>18</sup> It is a hard-won reward from the era of Reconstruction, whose application to all who are born on U.S. soil has been the reality of American citizenship for almost two centuries and affirmed by SCOTUS precedent. Unfortunately, the current administration has promulgated an executive order seeking to eliminate universal birthright citizenship.<sup>19</sup> This order has been blocked by several federal judges who have excoriated its provisions, clarifying that the elimination of birthright citizenship via executive order is not only illegal<sup>20</sup> but also would be disastrous. **Hispanic Federation demands that all branches of the federal government preserve and defend birthright citizenship.**

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DISASTROUS.**

## Representation

- **The Census:** The census is one of the most crucial operations conducted by the U.S. government.<sup>21</sup> It determines Congressional representation and guides policy from appropriations for social programs to federal responses on issues ranging from natural disaster to national security. Nonetheless, the Latino community is routinely overlooked by the federal census, with the 2020 Census estimated to have undercounted Latinos by almost 5%.<sup>22</sup> The Census must be empowered to ensure an accurate count for all. Existing data collection methods and continuous monitoring already provide sufficient and timely information to assess progress and make informed decisions. The national census is therefore an effective and productive use of our nation's resources. Consequently, we urge fully funding the Census Bureau for an amount no less than its requested budget, to ensure that minority and rural communities are accurately counted. **Hispanic Federation demands that the Census be fortified for generations to come via expanded funding, preservation of repeated knock requirements, mid-cycle surveys, and the maintenance of questions that ascertain the welfare of vulnerable populations.**

- Although discussed for decades, Census authorities have intentionally declined to add a citizenship question to the decennial count.<sup>23</sup> Hispanic Federation opposes the addition of a question about citizenship status in the Census. Its inclusion would increase costs, lower response rates, and exacerbate inaccurate population counts, thereby misdirecting resources for vital services.<sup>24</sup> It would in turn undermine the Census's obligation to "count each person in our country – whether citizen or noncitizen – once, only once, and in the right place."<sup>25</sup> **Hispanic Federation exhorts federal officials to reject any calls for the Census to include citizenship questions.**
- Likewise, we advocate for the elimination of barriers that prevent our communities in Puerto Rico from being counted in the 2030 Census. Additionally, we encourage relevant agencies to obtain better economic data about Puerto Rico and to ensure that Puerto Rico is included in the "American Housing Survey." **Hispanic Federation is adamant that all U.S. states and territories, including Puerto Rico, must be included in essential Census operations.**
- **Judicial Nominations:** Without a representative judiciary, it is impossible for the Latino community to systematically receive rulings that incorporate our perspectives and knowledge or understand our needs. President Biden appointed roughly one-third of all active Latino lifetime judges. **Hispanic Federation calls for the nomination of qualified judges who reflect the breadth of experience, ideologies, and priorities of all American communities, Latinos included.**
  - Furthermore, we encourage Senators to consult with leading community members from Latino groups, neighborhoods, and organizations in drafting their blue-slip opinions to guarantee that such opinions take into consideration the perspectives of our communities. **Hispanic Federation urges Senators to ensure that the judicial nominees they approve are truly representative of the populations whose districts they are nominated to adjudicate.**
- **Disability Rights and Access:** The expansion of civil rights law to encompass the disabled community under provisions like the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was a triumph of bipartisan investment in communities long underserved by our nation's infrastructure and economy. Today, Congress has a continued responsibility to uphold and strengthen these protections. This responsibility includes reaffirming and expanding safeguards against disparate impacts and broadening the scope of covered definitions to include other vulnerable communities that remain without legal protections. **Hispanic Federation calls upon Congress to reinvest in the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act.**
- **Data Equity in Federal Research:** The modern world runs on data and algorithms. However, federal data guidelines relating to race and data are inconsistent. Indeed, there remain federal agencies whose publicly reported data do not disaggregate ethnicity from race, effectively rendering the Latino community invisible. Even when terms like "Hispanic" or "Latino" are used, many data sets rarely capture the breadth of the Latino community, with varying problems and needs depending on cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. **Hispanic Federation calls upon the federal government to ensure that executive and legislative staffing and regional committees are instructed to pursue compositions matching those of the populations they serve.**<sup>26</sup>

## Rights and Safety

- **Safe Firearm Storage:** Hispanic Federation urges the expansion of and funding for safe firearm storage programs to provide American households with the means to reduce risks of undue harm to themselves and their communities. Programs funding safe storage devices including gun safes, monitoring devices, and re-registration programs enjoy bipartisan popularity and are successful with new and long-term gunowners alike, suggesting a promising avenue to reduce preventable and tragic gun-related deaths. **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to provide funding for safe firearm storage initiatives across the country.**
- **Firearms and Mental Health:** Approximately 37% of Latino gun deaths are suicides.<sup>27</sup> This tragic reality highlights the need for urgent mental health services with a focus on immediate violence prevention. Preexisting programs like the suicide prevention hotline require greater funding to reduce wait-times and ensure that callers may be directed to linguistically and culturally competent interlocutors.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, expanded coverage and funding for mental health will provide critical resources that would work toward self-harm prevention. **Hispanic Federation entreats the federal government to redouble its commitment to mental health and expand red flag laws and other psychiatric bars to firearm access to mitigate the risks of self-harm that stem from the intersections of poor mental health and firearm access.**
- **Ghost Guns:** The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' (ATF) expansion of means-based policing including the tracking of crime guns and targeting the proliferation of ghost guns has yielded success at hindering the most severe offenders.<sup>29</sup> While the vast majority of American gunowners are law-abiding hobbyists or concerned citizens who purchase their firearms legally and follow requisite registration steps the growing proliferation of ghost guns by nefarious actors risks precipitously setting back public safety efforts. By focusing on those who explicitly circumvent such regulations, federal law enforcement has been able to target those disinclined to follow other federal statutes, including against violent acts; these efforts should be renewed. **Hispanic Federation demands that lifesaving, crime-stopping work monitoring ghost and crime guns be maintained.**
- **Incarcerated Rights:** Latino individuals are incarcerated at a rate 4 times higher than that of non-Hispanic whites.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the Latino community is disproportionately exposed to abuses within the carceral system, including wage theft, services fraud, and eroding civil rights. These civil rights failings are only magnified in the face of documented racially and ethnically discriminatory practices within U.S. prisons.<sup>31</sup> Abuses are only exacerbated within the juvenile carceral system. For far too long, the use of capricious and punitive tools like solitary confinement has been permitted despite well-documented adverse effects.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, researchers and activists have documented for decades widespread instances of sexual assault in prisons,<sup>33</sup> with one ultimately likening its persistent prevalence to a "modern corollary of slavery."<sup>34</sup> Congress must modernize civil rights protections for incarcerated individuals, not only be addressing these most flagrantly heinous of abuses, but also by enhancing access to basic environmental protections like air conditioning,<sup>35</sup> augmented proactive rights compliance checks and the oversight powers of independent watchdogs. **Hispanic Federation implores that Congress pass new legislation bringing the rights of the incarcerated into the 21st century.**
- **Community Safety Reform:** The raft of firearm-facilitated violence that has emerged in the United States risks infringing upon vulnerable communities' civil rights to safe and healthy environments. Community policing has proven effective at forging partnerships between local communities and law enforcement officers (LEOs), thereby proactively preventing crime, establishing trust between vulnerable and at-risk communities and law enforcement and reducing the costs of law enforcement.<sup>36</sup> While the majority of Latinos feel confident in their local LEO's, their confidence in and support for local law enforcement remains below non-Hispanic white peers, suggesting the clear need for further trust-building reforms.<sup>37</sup>

Funding pilot and expansion programs for community-based policing would facilitate these goals. Likewise, the implementation of community violence intervention (CVI) programs have contributed to a multiyear decline in violent crime rates; the most successful have reduced violent crime by 30%, while further increasing community trust in law enforcement.<sup>38</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to reinvest in programs like community policing and community violence intervention that are proven to increase public safety for all Americans.**

- **Gun Shows and Background Checks:** It remains a tragic truth that one of the greatest factors facilitating categories of violence against the Latino community, including domestic violence, is the ambient availability of firearms.<sup>39</sup> For years, unscrupulous actors have exploited lax regulations surrounding the purchase of firearms to circumvent longstanding background checks and other regulatory interventions that hundreds of millions have used responsibly for decades.<sup>40</sup> **Hispanic Federation exhorts the federal government to enact legislation closing loopholes around firearm purchase background checks and registrations, including the gun show loophole, to augment public safety.**
- **LGBTQ+ Rights:** Despite recent advancements in legal rights and increasing social acceptance, the LGBTQ+ community continues to experience discrimination across the country. Latine LGBTQ+ people—and especially transgender Latine people—face increasingly stark disparities in their health and well-being when compared to non-LGBTQ+ people. Hispanic Federation is committed to protecting and expanding the rights of the Latine LGBTQ+ community. Our work through projects like the Advance Change Together (ACT) initiative<sup>41</sup> have strengthened Latine LGBTQ+ nonprofits across the country that serve as critical lifelines for our communities. **Hispanic Federation demands federal officials pursue vital measures to preserve and advance for the LGBTQ+ community including:**
  - Amend preexisting civil rights law, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991 to explicitly include protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity to ensure nondiscrimination against LGBTQ+ populations in areas including employment, housing, public accommodations and spaces, and services such as banks, legal service, retail, and transportation.
    - These amendments should include renewed interpretation of Title IX to affirmatively include LGBTQ+ identities, including federal reciprocity guidance for marriages, adoptions, and gender transition.
  - Congress must take legislative steps to clarify avenues for oversight and recourse for LGBTQ+ individuals whose civil rights have been violated by those erroneously claiming a religious right to discrimination in theaters protected by civil rights law. Just as those claims were erroneous when applied to matters of race during the civil rights movement, so too are they now.
  - Proactive and reactive civil rights support for LGBTQ+ students in K12 and higher ed classrooms with an eye toward advancing belonging and attainment.
    - Likewise, Congress must act to oppose any legislation that seeks to minimize the appearance or participation of LGBTQ+ students or families from our nation's schools, including in the parental rights of LGBTQ+ parents, and participation in extracurricular activities and wraparound programming.
  - Support for physical and mental healthcare, including a vigorous defense against still widespread discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community from medical service providers.
    - These protections must include the proactive guarantee of access to both physical and mental gender affirming care, ensuring that government does not intervene between patients and medical practitioners tendering best-practices care.

- Likewise, it is essential that Congress act to legally indemnify medical practitioners against criminal or civil suits stemming from state or local laws that seek to restrict their ability to provide best-practice standards of care treatments to LGBTQ+ individuals, including adolescents. While these protections should not extend to practitioners plausibly accused of negligence or unscrupulous practice, Congress cannot abide the medical marginalization of vulnerable groups like the transgender population.
  - Recent polling suggests that at least 7.4% of Americans affirmatively identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>42</sup> However, the federal government inconsistently tabulates LGBTQ+ identities in data collection, even in essential areas like hate crime statistics and medical care access. It is essential that the federal government consistently and universally collects and incorporates data on LGBTQ+ individuals.
  - Research consistently and clearly confirms that the harmful and discriminatory suite of practices colloquially known as “conversion therapy” are, at best, ineffective, and more often deleterious, even amounting to “torture.”<sup>43</sup> It is inappropriate that this senseless and cruel practice should continue; as such, Congress must take steps to ban ‘conversion therapy.’
  - The U.S. must restore and maintain access to humanitarian asylum for prospective LGBTQ+ asylee’s seeking refuge from discriminatory regimes or hostile environments.
- **Linguistic Civil Rights Protections:** In 2000, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13166, affirming the official policy of the executive branch that linguistic access is a covered component of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>44</sup> That order codified Supreme Court precedent and disparate executive opinions that civil rights and commensurate access to federal services were not proscribed by one’s level of English proficiency. While that order has been recently rescinded, linguistic access remains protected, albeit to varying degrees across a kaleidoscopic regulatory landscape.<sup>45</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands Congress take up legislation amending Title VI to codify these linguistic protections into law.**

**HISPANIC FEDERATION  
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## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### Voting and Civic Engagement

- Going into the 2024 election, 61.5% of eligible Latino citizens were registered to vote, though not all of these went on to vote. Historically, Hispanic Federation's civic engagement programmatic work has seen effective rates of electoral participation; in past years, 88% of those registered by Hispanic Federation went on to vote.<sup>46</sup>
- Since 2016 alone, Hispanic Federation has helped 175k eligible Latinos register to vote.<sup>47</sup>
- At present, 25 states employ a version of automatic voter registration.<sup>48</sup> These states range from California to West Virginia, highlighting that automatic voter registration enjoys bipartisan support and is feasible in both urban and rural environments.
- In point of order, it is and has been illegal for noncitizens to vote in federal elections in the U.S. for over a century, and a clearly outlined federal crime since the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.<sup>49</sup>
  - Furthermore, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 empowered the federal government to require certain information to register for federal elections, which at present includes a question affirmatively declaring U.S. citizenship under penalty of perjury, alongside a signature.<sup>50</sup>
  - Consequently, noncitizen voter registration is rare, and typically happens by accident.<sup>51</sup>
  - Furthermore, as noncitizen voting constitutes a felony, incidents of noncitizen voting remain even less common,<sup>52</sup> and violators of the statute are typically identified swiftly.<sup>53</sup>
  - Research conducted by the Brennan Center and cited by Snopes suggests that only 66% of voting-age women "have a document with their current legal name proving citizenship" with a further ~22m people, roughly 9% of the electorate, lacking ready access to the requisite documentation, and another almost 4 million lacking them entirely not having possession of required documents.<sup>54</sup>
- The vast majority of Americans oppose districting that intends to confer partisan advantage.<sup>55</sup>
  - Despite these preferences, partisan gerrymandering advances with shocking abandon; Illinois for instance in 2020 saw almost half of its state legislative races go uncontested,<sup>56</sup> arguably courtesy of the political realities of a pro-Democratic gerrymander.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, research from Princeton University has found Florida's state legislative maps to be engineered to create pro-Republican partisan advantage.<sup>58</sup> In conjunction, the two cases highlight that the issue is one that extends across party lines, hindering electoral engagement across the country.
- As of now, seven states across the political alignment have switched to independent commissions for redistricting. Nonpartisan drawn districts are more likely to be racially representative, helping address downstream racial redistricting inequities.<sup>59</sup>
- HF's own civic engagement work has confirmed that voters are more likely to be engaged if they understand what's at stake in the ballot box, including through approachable information that matches their linguistic needs and preferences.<sup>60</sup>

**TWENTY-FIVE STATES EMPLOY A VERSION OF AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION. THESE STATES RANGE FROM CALIFORNIA TO WEST VIRGINIA, HIGHLIGHTING THAT AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION ENJOYS BIPARTISAN SUPPORT**

- States like New York and Connecticut have made early and no-excuse absentee voting permanent with advocacy from Hispanic Federation and our partners.<sup>61</sup>

## Representation

- Hispanic Federation has long championed data equity and disaggregation and urges the federal government to build on successful state-level models to ensure more accurate, inclusive, and actionable data collection nationwide. This experience informs our exhorting the federal government to look to successful state-level programs<sup>62</sup> as a model to move national data programs into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- HF's support for data equity has yielded results at the state level in guaranteeing appropriate representation while increasing community buy-in and cooperation with strategic initiatives.<sup>63</sup>
- HF research confirms that data plays a critical role in shaping educational priorities and practices, particularly for new students who are either immigrants or aging into the system or both.<sup>64</sup>
- A 2022 analysis found that fewer than 9% of lifetime appointed federal judges were Latino, despite Latinos standing at almost 20% of the total population. Simultaneously, the same report found that five of the thirteen federal circuit courts lacked any Latino judges.<sup>65</sup>

## Rights and Safety

- Approximately 400 children are involved in unintentional shootings each year in the U.S. An estimated 85% of unintentional firearm injuries among children could be prevented through responsible storage practices.<sup>66</sup>
- Latinos are disproportionately killed during encounters with police at a rate more than 1.3 times higher than non-Hispanic whites, with rates only rising.<sup>67</sup>
- The vast majority of Americans supports reforming the criminal justice and carceral systems, with strong bipartisan support for policies that reconsider approaches to nonviolent crimes, thereby permitting law enforcement to focus their efforts on pressing matters of community safety.<sup>68</sup>
- Likewise, most Latinos respect their local law enforcement and support policies enabling them to serve and protect their communities.<sup>69</sup>
- In fact, more than 20% of federal law enforcement officers are Latino as are more than 14% of all local law enforcement.<sup>70</sup>
- Current higher education students are more likely than the general population to identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>71</sup>
- Simultaneously, Latino adults are more likely to be members of the LGBTQ+ community than other demographics.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, a 2022 study found that Latino adults were almost twice as likely as non-Hispanic white and Black Americans to identify as LGBTQ, at 11% vs. 6.2% and 6.6%, respectively.<sup>73</sup>
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community are at particular risk of facing negative mental health conditions, with incidence of mental health challenges twice as high among the LGB community and four times higher among Trans individuals.<sup>74</sup> These mental health disparities are often linked to experiences of stigma, discrimination, and social isolation.<sup>75</sup>

**LGBTQ+ LATINO COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE AT PARTICULAR RISK OF FACING NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, WITH INCIDENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES TWICE AS HIGH AMONG THE LGB COMMUNITY AND FOUR TIMES HIGHER AMONG TRANS INDIVIDUALS.**

- Anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination has been increasing across the world, fueling a growing epidemic of displaced people. In turn, many seek the relative stability and support of the United States, though journalistic reporting affirms that many have struggled to access asylum,<sup>76</sup> even during periods in which facilitating asylum for those fleeing anti-LGBTQ persecution was an administration priority.<sup>77</sup>
- As of 2021, there were over 1.2m LGBTQ+ immigrants in the United States, according to research from UCLA's Williams Institute. Of these, approximately 50% were Latine.<sup>78</sup>

### CONCLUSION

For too long, the federal government has rested on the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, allowing essential rights and freedoms like enfranchisement, equal protection, and fair representation to stagnate. The Latino community has borne much of the weight of this stagnation. As such, Hispanic Federation has outlined here a gamut of reforms, grounded in research and popular consensus, including voter registration overhauls, advancements in community safety, and modernizing census and redistricting considerations. Each of these would have the effect of bolstering fair and equitable participation in American civic life while restoring trust and fairness in the federal government.

As our nation approaches the 250th anniversary of independence, the dynamic promise of the American Revolution is more relevant than ever. That promise of a government of, by, and for the people, premised upon a faith in the essential dignity of all persons has inspired generations not just in our own nation, but the world over. In an era of widening inequality, information overloads, and global challenges to democracy, redoubling our commitment to the foundational principles of the American republic has become more essential than ever. Reinvesting in voting access, truly representative governance, and universal civil rights protections is not only a moral obligation but a prerequisite for America's success.

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# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Health Care

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“Once a dream, it is now my pledge to be a good doctor for all who live in this great country. My motto as your Surgeon General will be ‘good science and good sense.’ And so, I ask for your help and the grace of God as I strive to give something back to the Nation that has been so good to me.”*

*– Antonia Novella, MD and former U.S. Surgeon General.<sup>1</sup>*

Hispanic Federation (HF) believes that access to affordable, effective, and culturally competent health care should be a fundamental right, and that that right is imminently achievable in this country. We have taken a national leadership role in raising awareness of Latino health disparities, promoting strategies to improve Latino health, increasing Latinos’ access to affordable and quality health care, regardless of immigration status, and providing supportive grants to nonprofit organizations that address health disparities in communities of color. Our agenda builds upon these successes to highlight avenues by which the federal government may continue to support safe, healthy communities.

**ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE,  
EFFECTIVE, AND  
CULTURALLY COMPETENT  
HEALTHCARE SHOULD BE  
A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT**

We at Hispanic Federation understand that public health campaigns are more effective when conducted with interlocutors who are well-enmeshed in targeted communities. That’s why we have striven to work with government health partners to boost vaccination rates with considerable success — in New York State for instance, bringing the Latino community to the second-highest vaccination rate for crucial jabs, subverting national trends.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Hispanic Federation has actively promoted mental health awareness via innovative initiatives like Por Nosotros, a program designed to reduce stigma and address mental health issues among Latino community-based organizations and their frontline staff, which combines provider outreach with artistic enterprises.

Over the subsequent pages, we outline a vision of public health that holistically approaches the real threats to Hispanic health. These include investments in data and research to proactively identify potential challenges before they become epidemics, the co-equal consideration of mental and physical health, and targeted considerations for vulnerable populations like transgender individuals and those living with HIV/AIDS.

## SITUATION REPORT

While recent years have brought improvement, health care remains a critical challenge for all Americans, and Latinos in particular. The Latino community has the highest uninsured rates of major demographic groups in the country with 16.8% of Latinos lacking any form of health insurance compared to 5.3% of non-Hispanic whites, and we face exorbitant gaps in private coverage, increasing dependence on public programs.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Latino community simultaneously needs the federal government to encourage the private sector to support Latinos to the same degree it does non-Hispanic whites, and for federal coverage to cover a greater share of Hispanic health care needs.

Fortunately, the Affordable Care Act has quickly become a cornerstone of the American health care system, bridging gaps between essential needs-based programs like Medicaid with employer-driven private insurance. It has proven effective on that particular point, with the uninsured rates falling across demographic groups.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Latino community has benefited from increased access to care via the ACA, with fewer Latinos reporting that they lack a usual source of care, delaying prescriptions, or worrying about and having trouble paying medical bills.<sup>5</sup> There remain some key challenges in the effective implementation of the Affordable Care Act from the perspective of the Latino community, however. Studies suggest there are uneven, inconsistent gains in health care affordability and access according to linguistic capacity.<sup>6</sup>

**THE LATINO COMMUNITY  
HAS THE HIGHEST  
UNINSURED RATES OF  
MAJOR DEMOGRAPHIC  
GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY**

These challenges are dwarfed though by reductions in subsidies for health care premiums and alterations to eligibility that risk undermining health care gains for millions of families. Yet more troubling are imminent reductions in Medicaid funding to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars, which are expected to eliminate health care access for millions of American households. As these unconscionable cuts to health care programs unfold over the coming months and years, our nation's most vulnerable will face both confusion and chaotic unwinding of eligibility and coverage. These coverage gaps exacerbate outcomes from rising rates of chronic conditions like obesity and diabetes. Regrettably, elevated rates of food scarcity combined with challenges accessing fresh produce put Latinos at a disadvantage in addressing the root causes of such conditions.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, real-world data demonstrates that when presented with culturally competent public health campaigns, Latino individuals are more likely than the average American to engage in preventative and chronic treatment, suggesting a clear path forward.<sup>8</sup>

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Public Health Initiatives

- Vaccination Programs:** Repeated real world trials and biological theory render it incontrovertible that vaccines work.<sup>9</sup> Public vaccination campaigns ended polio,<sup>10</sup> smallpox,<sup>11</sup> and are even contributing to a massive decline in cervical cancer rates.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the Latino community suffers from markedly lower vaccination rates than our non-Hispanic white peers.<sup>13</sup> To address these imbalances, Congress should expand preexisting vaccine education campaigns to include a greater array of linguistically competent and culturally relevant programming. Furthermore, while the Department of Health and Human Services has recently stepped back from its traditional support for vaccination campaigns, it is clear that safe and effective vaccination continues to enjoy bipartisan consensus.<sup>14</sup> **Thus, we call upon Congress to redouble its commitment to vaccination as a central pillar of public health.**
- Rejoin the WHO:** On January 20, 2025, the United States began the process of withdrawing from the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>15</sup> While the WHO has occasionally missed the mark, it also has provided invaluable forewarning and collaborative opportunities in dealing with everything from Ebola to West Nile Virus.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the United States risks losing access to life-saving networks that advance US global interests. **Consequently, Hispanic Federation exhorts the Administration to reverse this withdrawal to maximize American opportunities.**
- Mental health programming:** Mental health looms increasingly large over American discourse, with majorities maintaining that there exists an epidemic of mental health challenges.<sup>17</sup> However, the Latino community in general is being left behind in this mental health awakening, with Latinos being 60% less likely to seek treatment for mental health conditions than non-Hispanic whites.<sup>18</sup> **Hispanic Federation calls for mental health policies attuned to Latinos, the LGBTQ+ community, and new arrivals in particular, as well as essential health-facing social media reforms.**

**VACCINES WORK**

**THE LATINO COMMUNITY IN GENERAL IS BEING LEFT BEHIND IN THIS MENTAL HEALTH AWAKENING, WITH LATINOS BEING 60% LESS LIKELY TO SEEK TREATMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS THAN NON-HISPANIC WHITES**

  - We urge the federal government to work with partners to develop programs supporting immigrant mental health, including that of mixed-status families, by expanding treatment options through uncovered resident funds.
  - Education scholarship indicates that well-funded afterschool programs and extracurricular options reduce isolation and anger.<sup>19</sup> Hispanic Federation endorses redoubling funding for such initiatives to support the healthy development of well-rounded youth and communities.
  - Approximately 37% of Latino gun deaths are suicides.<sup>20</sup> This tragic reality underscores the need for urgent mental health services. While measures like the suicide prevention hotline are excellent launch points, they require greater funding to reduce wait-times and ensure that callers may be directed to linguistically and culturally competent interlocutors.<sup>21</sup>
- HIV/AIDs:** According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), screening and treatment can yield transformative results for most Latinos living with HIV.<sup>22</sup> It is vital that research, screening, and treatment gaps be addressed. Hispanic Federation has been serving the HIV-positive community for decades through programs combining awareness campaigns, developing

public policy, and connecting individuals living with HIV/AIDS to culturally-competent care.<sup>23</sup> **As such, Hispanic Federation implores Congress take the following steps to build upon our nation's recent successes in combatting HIV/AIDS:**

- Fully fund the plan to end HIV in America by 2030.
  - Promulgate a policy guidance affirming that nondiscriminatory access to health care for LGBTQ+ individuals and support services is an essential component of public health policy, including in the fight against HIV/AIDS.
  - Pass long-term, obligated budgets for the CDC, Human Resource Service Administration, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) such that those departments can conduct long-term strategic health campaigns.
- NONDISCRIMINATORY ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS AND SUPPORT SERVICES IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY**
- **Nutrition:** Latinos accounted for 21.9% of adult and 35.8% of youth Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries in 2023.<sup>24</sup> Food insecurity continues to be a core problem facing Latino households; **as such, Hispanic Federation demands that Congress implement systemic improvements to nutrition availability.**
    - The Community Eligibility Provision is a federal program offering compensation for free or reduced school meals to participating schools on school-wide, rather than individual student bases. Since its implementation, it has proven successful at improving nutritional outcomes for the nations' pupils<sup>25</sup> and has plausibly boosted health and educational outcomes as well.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, changes in linked federal benefit programs, including SNAP and Medicaid, have put these gains at risk for millions of students. **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress take steps to preserve the CEP eligible population, including by lowering the statutory Identified Student Percentage (ISP), boosting the compensation formula, or by extending the ISP calculation horizon.**
    - Reforms like those proposed under the Closing the Meal Gap Act would scale SNAP benefits by calculating them according to the Low Cost Food Plan versus the current Thrifty Food Plan, and require regular revisions of SNAP benefits to reflect best practices nutritional guidelines.<sup>27</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to enact such reforms as a way to ensure all Americans have stable access to quality food: boosting health, productivity, and agricultural economic output.**
    - At present, Puerto Rico receives its nutrition benefits from the Nutrition Assistance Program — a block grant program that is wholly distinct from SNAP. Its austere terms delimit nutrition assistance in Puerto Rico to roughly 75% of the benefits on a per capita basis than other Americans receive, and suffer uniquely negative nutritional outcomes because of it. It is past time that Puerto Rico be restored to the full SNAP program from the NAP program.
    - The Chronic-Special Needs Program or C-SNP under Medicare advantage provides nutrition and other benefits to those with diagnosed chronic conditions.<sup>28</sup> This program serves a vital role in supporting Latinos, including those living with diabetes. Its eligibility should be expanded to those with diagnosed pre-diabetes and a mirror program implemented in Medicaid.
    - Furthermore, **Hispanic Federation implores the creation of new rules obligating health insurance providers to tender benefits toward social determinants of health, chiefly nutrition and activity through options like:**

- Broadening eligible expenses under HSA and FSA plans to include nutritionist coverage, healthy food, and exercise for pre-diabetes and at-risk weight ranges, or ideally for general health.
  - The creation of new programs under Medicaid modeled after plans like Humana's Healthy Options program<sup>29</sup> and C-SNP that provide benefits for nutrition and other lifestyle alterations for those battling chronic conditions.<sup>30</sup>
  - Pilot programs and cohort studies for insurers like Medicaid, Tricare, and private insurers assessing the viability of covering costs associated with healthy lifestyles, like dietary and activity interventions, to lower long-term health care costs.
- **Social Determinants of Health:** Public health research increasingly validates that factors ranging from education to social relationships to local spaces are crucial in shaping health outcomes on not only community bases, but indeed on the individual level.<sup>31</sup> As such, public health scholars and officials have embraced the social determinants of health as an actionable framework for improving individual and societal health outcomes.<sup>32</sup> The Centers for Disease Control have identified five pillars of public health action orchestrated around the social determinants: education access, health care and quality, neighborhood and built environment, social and community context, and economic stability.<sup>33</sup> In turn, the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's 'Healthy People 2030' campaign urged the adoption of policies to address inequality across these pillars to improve public health outcomes.<sup>34</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges the Administration to continue and fully support these programs, and for Congress to pass statutory language requiring federally-funded public health programs to consider and address the social determinants of health.**
  - **Safe Firearm Storage:** Hispanic Federation urges the expansion of and funding for safe firearm storage programs to provide American households with the means to reduce risks of undue harm to themselves and their communities. Programs funding safe storage devices including gun safes, monitoring devices, and re-registration programs enjoy bipartisan popularity and are successful with new and long-term gunowners alike, suggesting a promising avenue to reduce preventable and tragic gun-related deaths. **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to provide funding for safe firearm storage initiatives across the country.**
  - **Firearms and Mental Health:** Approximately 37% of Latino gun deaths are suicides.<sup>35</sup> This tragic reality highlights the need for urgent mental health services with a focus on immediate violence prevention. Preexisting programs like the suicide prevention hotline require greater funding to reduce wait-times and ensure that callers may be directed to linguistically and culturally competent interlocutors.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, expanded coverage and funding for mental health will provide critical resources that would work toward self-harm prevention. **Hispanic Federation entreats the federal government to redouble its commitment to mental health and expand red flag laws and other psychiatric bars to firearm access to mitigate the risks of self-harm that stem from the intersections of poor mental health and firearm access.**
  - **Ghost Guns:** The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' (ATF) expansion of means-based policing including the tracking of crime guns and targeting the proliferation of ghost guns has yielded success at hindering the most severe offenders.<sup>37</sup> While the vast majority of American gunowners are law-abiding hobbyists or concerned citizens who purchase their firearms legally and follow requisite registration steps the growing proliferation of ghost guns by nefarious actors risks precipitously setting back public safety efforts. By focusing on those who explicitly circumvent such regulations, federal law enforcement has been able to target those disinclined to follow other federal statutes, including against violent acts; these efforts should be renewed. **Hispanic Federation demands that lifesaving, crime-stopping work monitoring ghost and crime guns be maintained.**

- **Community Safety Reform:** The raft of firearm-facilitated violence that has emerged in the United States risks infringing upon vulnerable communities' civil rights to safe and healthy environments. Community policing has proven effective at forging partnerships between local communities and law enforcement officers (LEOs), thereby proactively preventing crime, establishing trust between vulnerable and at-risk communities and law enforcement and reducing the costs of law enforcement.<sup>38</sup> While the majority of Latinos feel confident in their local LEO's, their confidence in and support for local law enforcement remains below non-Hispanic white peers, suggesting the clear need for further trust-building reforms.<sup>39</sup> Funding pilot and expansion programs for community-based policing would facilitate these goals. Likewise, the implementation of community violence intervention (CVI) programs have contributed to a multiyear decline in violent crime rates; the most successful have reduced violent crime by 30%, while further increasing community trust in law enforcement.<sup>40</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to reinvest in programs like community policing and community violence intervention that are proven to increase public safety for all Americans.**
- **Gun Shows and Background Checks:** It remains a tragic truth that one of the greatest factors facilitating categories of violence against the Latino community, including domestic violence, is the ambient availability of firearms.<sup>41</sup> For years, unscrupulous actors have exploited lax regulations surrounding the purchase of firearms to circumvent longstanding background checks and other regulatory interventions that hundreds of millions have used responsibly for decades.<sup>42</sup> **Hispanic Federation exhorts the federal government to enact legislation closing loopholes around firearm purchase background checks and registrations, including the gun show loophole, to augment public safety.**

**ADMINISTRATIONS  
HAVE AUTHORIZED  
MEDICARE TO  
NEGOTIATE DRUG  
PRICES WITH  
REMARKABLE SUCCESS**

### Health Care Access and Affordability

- **Health Care Resourcing:** Recent changes to federal support for health care providers and trainers has created a looming gulf between necessary and available resources. Research suggests that hundreds of rural hospitals are at imminent risk of closure after drastic cuts to federal compensation formulae and looming reductions to Medicaid funding, which far exceed a rural hospital funding patch.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, even as the United States faces a nursing shortage estimated in the hundreds of thousands over the next few years,<sup>44</sup> the federal government has restricted access to federal student financial aid for nursing students, as well as nurse practitioners and physicians assistants.<sup>45</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to pass legislation repealing these new limits on federal compensation for health care providers and to restore full access to student financial aid for all seeking to entire health care professions.**
- **Prescription Drug Access:** As prices for prescription drugs continue to rise, the Latino community is harder hit than many, with Hispanic adults at a higher likelihood than non-Hispanic whites of skipping medication due to cost.<sup>46</sup> These developments come as the U.S. already spends more on prescription drugs than any other developed nation, with prices 2-4 times higher than in peer nations like Australia, Canada, and France, totaling almost 10% of all health care spending.<sup>47</sup>
  - Government Accountability Office (GAO) research suggests that market-based strategies, including supporting competition but also negotiation, are a promising avenue for reducing prescription drug prices. In turn, administrations have authorized Medicare to negotiate drug prices, with remarkable success.<sup>48</sup> **Hispanic Federation encourages the federal government to retain and expand market-based drug-price negotiation programs.**

- **340B Drug Pricing:** Since its inception in 1992, the 340B drug pricing program has emerged as a vital pillar of the country's medical safety net. Through the provision of subsidies to outpatient medical facilities, the 340B program has facilitated expanded access to health care among vulnerable and affluent populations alike.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the program has, at best, inconsistently passed on those subsidies to patients as reductions in the costs of care. As such, the 340B program should be simultaneously expanded and clarified to ensure that it best serves the population it was intended to support. Congress should implement statutory program oversight and transparency reforms to require entities to disclose how they use 340B savings and report key metrics such as charity care levels, community benefit investments, and patient demographics. Likewise, reauthorization of the program must mandate that covered entities, particularly hospitals, implement income-based sliding scale policies for 340B drugs, prohibit aggressive debt collection for low-income individuals, and publicly post their assistance policies. **We urge Congress to pass these reforms to the 340B program to further improve fiscal and geographic access to quality health care.**
  - As an additional option, Congress should fund a study of nationwide implementation of restrictions akin to those of California's proposition 34 which requires certain nonprofit providers to spend 98% of revenue from federal prescription drug discount programs on direct patient care and expanded drug price negotiation programs.<sup>50</sup> A national version of these programs may reduce the transfer of health care price overhead to patients.
- **Medicaid:** Medicaid is a vital resource for the Latino community. Thus, we not only oppose any proposed reduction in Medicaid services, but also encourage the expansion of health programmatic eligibility within and beyond Medicaid both for initial and comprehensive benefits coverage to approach the goal of universal coverage of all Latinos and all Americans. Unfortunately, recent legislation will strip hundreds of billions in funding for Medicaid over the next decade, jeopardizing access to health care for millions of Americans.<sup>51</sup> **As such, Hispanic Federation not only demands that Congress take steps to reverse these cuts to Medicaid spending, but also to explore further initiatives to expand and strengthen the program for decades to come.**
  - The 1332 State innovation waivers have proven successful in encouraging innovation in coverage through the Affordable Care Act to supplement other forms of federal coverage, and as such should be continued and expanded.<sup>52</sup>
  - Hispanic Federation demands that the federal government expand full access to the Medicaid program for residents of Puerto Rico, with full details in Hispanic Federation's forthcoming chapter dedicated to policy recommendations on resolving the challenges facing Puerto Rico.
  - Hispanic Federation also supports the provision of funding to support initiatives like the implementation of Husky Health in Connecticut, which has been effective at closing gaps in care to ensure coverage for both minors and expectant and current mothers.
  - Additionally, the creation of a national version of New York's Excluded Workers Fund could provide a way for Congress to provide essential health care coverage to workers who are uncovered by traditional programs,<sup>53</sup> thereby reducing necessary and likely unredeemed costs from emergency room and urgent care visits.
- **The Affordable Care Act:** Since its passage in 2010, the Affordable Care Act has quickly become a cornerstone of the American health care system, bridging gaps between essential needs-based programs like Medicaid with employer-driven private insurance. There remain key challenges in the effective implementation of the Affordable Care Act from the perspective of the Latino

### MEDICAID IS A VITAL RESOURCE FOR THE LATINO COMMUNITY

community, however. Studies suggest there are uneven, inconsistent gains in health care affordability and access according to linguistic capacity.<sup>54</sup> These data are of no surprise to Hispanic Federation and our partners, who have worked diligently for years to support enrollment in and service within the ACA for our communities.<sup>55</sup>

**Pursuant to this information and our**

**programmatic experiences, Hispanic Federation urges the following actions:**

### **A NATIONAL VERSION OF NEW YORK'S EXCLUDED WORKERS FUND COULD PROVIDE A WAY FOR CONGRESS TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL HEALTHCARE COVERAGE TO WORKERS WHO ARE UNCOVERED BY TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS**

- Recent Congressional inaction on reauthorizing ACA marketplace plan premium subsidies permitted those subsidies to expire. In the intervening months, enrollment in previously subsidized plans has plummeted.<sup>56</sup> Partial estimates suggest that millions have already been forced away from affordable plans, suggesting that Congressional Budget Office estimates may have been an understatement.<sup>57</sup> It is essential that Congress reinstate these subsidies to reverse these staggering losses in health care access.
- Repeal recently passed changes to ACA enrollment periods and eligibility that are likely to lead to more than one million people losing coverage under the Affordable Care Act.<sup>58</sup>
- Public health officials must systematically consider access to language in awareness campaigns, registration programs, and plan notices. These measures would generate consistent and substantial gains in health care access at relatively low costs as there remain greater portions of non-English speakers lacking potential coverage under the ACA.
- The ACA has persistently seen uneven success in health care expansion when measured against national origin of enrollees. In turn, Hispanic Federation urges HHS to disaggregate data about ethnicity and country of origin of participants in the ACA to develop targeted strategies to maximize health care gains from allocation of educational and advertising resources. Furthermore, HHS should clarify data privacy firewalls guaranteeing that any personally identifiable information will only be used for the purposes of the purposes of provisioning health care and in Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Institutional Review Board (IRB)-compliant research, to ensure that eligible families and individuals feel safe and secure in enrolling in these plans.
- With research persistently<sup>59</sup> affirming<sup>60</sup> that Medicaid Expansion has resulted in extensions of health care access,<sup>61</sup> Hispanic Federation exhorts the federal government to take steps to address the concerns of individual states who have yet to embrace the voluntary expansion of Medicaid funding.
- Public support for DREAMers has been consistent since the initial implementation of DACA.<sup>62</sup> As such, HF calls for the Congressional implementation of terms akin to those of the judicially paused CMS ruling extending full coverage under the ACA to DACA recipients.<sup>63</sup>
- Finally, as recent federal experiments with varying levels of funding for the ACA at the national level have demonstrated that gains in health care from its provisions are highly sensitive to funding, we encourage ACA funding to be mapped out on an anticipated per-capita basis and from there regarded as a third-rail investment in public health, with commensurately reliable, robust funding.

### **Maternal and Reproductive Health**

- **Maternal Health:** The Latina community is facing a crisis in maternal health and infant mortality brought on by critical gaps in care, coverage, and certain prenatal benefits. Hispanic Federation

teams across multiple states have been active in developing programming and coordinating policy considerations in the fight to improve maternal health outcomes, from public information campaigns to midwife and doula expansion, as well as postpartum mental health.<sup>64</sup>

- **Hispanic Federation vigorously supports the passage and enactment of outstanding legislation to advance maternal health outcomes for our community, and prospective and current mothers across the country**, by:
  - Extending the supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children (WIC) to fully cover postpartum and breastfeeding periods.
  - Increasing data collection, equity, and disaggregation to better develop public health strategies.
  - Supporting the expansion of the perinatal workforce through education assistance programs and streamlining registration processes to maximize potential points of care for prospective and current moms.
- Recent research by the Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC has indicated that one critical gap in care for pregnant Latinas lay in the uptake of folic acid supplements. Latina women have a greater likelihood of giving birth to children with neural tube defects than both non-Hispanic white and Black women.<sup>65</sup> HF urges the renewal and expansion of public health campaigns to support uptake of 400mg of folic acid per day.
- **Reproductive Health:** The Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* transformed the reproductive health landscape in this country. Now growing numbers of states are restricting abortion care and moving to limit contraceptive access.<sup>66</sup> Now, close to 60% of Latinas are of typical childbearing age, and about 50% of Latinas live in states that heavily restrict reproductive rights.<sup>67</sup> Insufficient access to reproductive care is both a civil liberties issue and a public health risk.
  - **Hispanic Federation calls for codifying the universal right to contraceptive care, including over the counter, and for contraceptives to be fully covered by both public and private health insurance.**<sup>68</sup>
  - Hispanic Federation supports expanding and guaranteeing access to the full suite of reproductive care, including abortive procedures. Research in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* suggests that infant mortality rates have increased 7% since the *Dobbs* decision.<sup>69</sup>

**ABOUT 50% OF LATINAS LIVE IN STATES THAT HEAVILY RESTRICT REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS. INSUFFICIENT ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE CARE IS BOTH A CIVIL LIBERTIES ISSUE AND A PUBLIC HEALTH RISK**

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### Public Health Initiatives

- Hispanic Federation has taken a national leadership role in Latino public health initiatives including:
  - Raising awareness of Latino health disparities, promoting strategies to improve Latino health, increasing Latinos' access to affordable and quality health care, regardless of immigration status.
  - Providing supportive grants to nonprofit organizations that address health disparities in communities of color.
  - Working with government health partners to boost vaccination rates with considerable success — in New York State for instance, bringing the Latino community to the second-highest vaccination rate for crucial immunizations.<sup>70</sup>
  - Connecting vulnerable populations, including new Americans, with essential services like health plan enrollment to offset research-proven consequences of migrants<sup>71</sup> being at greater risk of mental health challenges than the populace at large through initiatives like Project Esperanza which connects families and individuals to programs and services that support vulnerable populations, including employment training, housing, and older adult services.<sup>72</sup>
  - Fighting against HIV/AIDS by designing and launching national, state-wide, and locally-focused health initiatives, including providing individuals with treatment information, and health care navigation services to vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers.<sup>73</sup>
  - Boosting nutrition in Latino communities including through providing information about nutrition science, nutrition programs, advocating for expansion of nutrition programs, and through direct aid.<sup>74</sup>
- In 2022, Latinos were 4x more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to be diagnosed with HIV. That year, the Latino community saw almost 32,000 new HIV cases, with diagnoses increasing 17% in the four-year period.<sup>75</sup>
  - While fewer than half of all Latino individuals in the US living with HIV have access to vital medication,<sup>76</sup> Latino testing rates are greater than the majority, and stage 3 HIV cases are almost 50% lower than non-Hispanics.
  - Furthermore, a majority of HIV-positive Latinos are retained in care, and 65% were virally suppressed.<sup>77</sup>
- Recent public health research has only validated the importance of the social determinants model to understanding health outcomes. For instance, growing literature illustrates that negative social determinant signifiers, like stress and housing insecurity, can produce negative health effects on the individual epigenetic level, potentially rivalling the consequences of behaviors like smoking.<sup>78</sup>

### Health Care Access and Affordability

- Hispanic Federation has advocated for the now approved 1332 waiver for New York State and is currently active in its implementation to ensure success in boosting not only coverage but also preventative care access.<sup>79</sup>
- The Affordable Care Act has proven effective at boosting health care access among Latinos, with the uninsured rate among non-Hispanic Whites falling from ~14% in 2008 to 8.5% in 2017,

among Blacks from ~22% in 2008 to 13.9% in 2017, and among Latinos from ~42% in 2008 to 25% in 2017.<sup>80</sup> Hispanic Federation has been active in supporting Latino enrollment in and service within the ACA.

- All told, some 24m of the nation's ~65m Latino individuals — 30% — were enrolled in Medicaid in 2020.<sup>81</sup> Across the program itself, Latinos accounted for 28% of all Medicaid and CHIP insured individuals in 2020, but of were 37% of beneficiaries falling under the category of "limited benefits."<sup>82</sup>
- Moreover, the Latino community has benefited from increased access to care via the ACA, with fewer Latinos reporting that they lack a usual source of care, delaying prescriptions, or worrying about and having trouble paying medical bills.<sup>83</sup>
- Research has suggested there exists significant variance in the ACA's augmentation of access to health care among Latinos based on nationality; for instance, Cuban-Americans benefited from the ACA far more than did Mexican-Americans, even when controlling for citizenship, language, education, region, and income.<sup>84</sup>
- Scholarly work continues to support the fact that ACA gains have been most striking in those states which elected to expand eligibility for Medicaid under the voluntary terms of the ACA.<sup>85</sup>
- Studies confirm that the efficacy of the ACA is sensitive to adjustments in funding, including for awareness and registration efforts. When components of funding were limited in 2019 for instance, some gains were partially reversed.<sup>86</sup>

### Maternal and Reproductive Health

- Latina expectant mothers are over twice as likely to receive late or no prenatal care than are non-Hispanic white expectant mothers.<sup>87</sup>
- Meanwhile, birth complication rates are already elevated and rising in our community,<sup>88</sup> with the maternal mortality rate rising precipitously over the last few years.<sup>89</sup> Elevated infant mortality rates at birth only compound the developing crisis in maternal mortality.<sup>90</sup>

**LATINA EXPECTANT MOTHERS  
ARE OVER TWICE AS LIKELY TO  
RECEIVE LATE OR NO PRENATAL  
CARE THAN ARE NON-HISPANIC  
WHITE EXPECTANT MOTHERS**

### CONCLUSION

A nation can only be as strong as its people, and a people can only be as strong as their health enables them to be. This basic, yet essential idea has spurred public health policy in the United States for centuries, from George Washington's mandatory inoculation of the Continental Army against smallpox in 1777 to Congress's creation of Medicare under the Great Society in 1965. Our economy relies on healthy workers, our children upon healthy classrooms, and our communities upon healthy neighbors. The last decades have seen inconsistent progress on Americans' access to health care, during which intermittent Congresses and Administrations have taken some steps that supported public health, and some that undermined it. As the United States continues to navigate the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is essential that that we seize this moment to guarantee that all Americans have access to affordable, quality health care.

Hispanic Federation has long stood at the forefront of community-based health care programming; as such, we are intimately familiar with the obstacles and opportunities facing America's health care system. Numerous disparities exist in our nation's health care system, from the uneven distribution of medical debt stemming from unpredictable and often exorbitant costs of care to challenges accessing not only specialists but even primary care providers. These imbalances trigger unacceptable downstream effects, from decreased educational outcomes to lower workplace productivity. Our nation enjoys the world's greatest corpus of medical expertise and productive capacity, and through effective policy like reinforcing Medicare and Medicaid, empowering medical research, and investing in community-based care providers, we can ensure that America's medical assets are shared by all of its people.

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## 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES:

# Economic Development

*"You cannot pretend that we do not exist. You cannot plead ignorance to our problems because we are here and we embody our needs for you. And we are not alone. We are accompanied by many friends... Furthermore, these groups are committing themselves to help us until total victory is achieved. The developments of the past seven months are only a slight indication of what is to come. The workers are on the rise." –Dolores Huerta<sup>1</sup>*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Present and future economic prosperity in the United States depends on effective support for and by Latinos. Whether as workers, pupils, investors, and job creators, Latinos represent the fastest growing segment of virtually every sector of the economy. As a nation, we must choose to uplift the Latino community and incorporate our dynamism and growth into the American economy writ large. Hispanic Federation has spent decades developing and supporting economic programming that has uplifted members of the Latino community into prosperous positions in sectors ranging from social sector to the cutting edge of digital development. Our targeted programs consistently lead to substantial increases in both relative and absolute earnings by participants, thereby boosting their standard of living and total GDP.<sup>2</sup> These successes inform not only the details of our recommendations below, but also a larger optimism about US economic potential if the Latino community is effectively supported.

**HELPING LATINOS EXCEL  
WILL BOOST AMERICAN  
EXCELLENCE ACROSS  
THE BOARD**

Hispanic Federation's economic policy recommendations are capacious and varied in representation of the full variety of economic positions and opportunities before the Latino community. From entrepreneurial capitalization reforms to outdoor labor protections, we propose measures that would address the economic needs of the moment to better support future growth. At their core, these measures would maintain vital guardrails while ensuring optimal investment in American communities. Our proposals are grounded in a simple yet powerful belief that maximizing opportunity at the community level optimizes avenues for future development and success. Helping Latinos excel will boost American excellence across the board.

## SITUATION REPORT

The Latino community is driving America's economic growth. We represent 19% of the United States civilian labor force, and, at over 32 million workers, our footprint on the national workforce has grown 69% since 2013, "a rate of growth more than 10 times that of the non-Hispanic workforce."<sup>3</sup> Over the last year, U.S. Latino annualized economic growth came in at 4.7%, and total U.S. Latino GDP is greater than the entire country of India.<sup>4</sup> This growth far exceeds the roughly 2.8% GDP growth of the US economy writ-large.<sup>5</sup> Latinos were responsible for 36% of new entrepreneurial ventures in 2023, despite being just under 20% of the population—a stark contrast to other demographics who have faced a net decline in businesses over the last two decades.<sup>6</sup>

Across over 5 million businesses, Latino entrepreneurs are responsible for nearly \$1tn in annual revenue, employing almost one million workers with "more than \$100 billion in annual payroll."<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the average personal tax contribution by Latinos has almost doubled over the last ten years. Total estimated tax revenue from Latinos now stands somewhere between \$200bn and \$325bn, illustrating how crucial our community is to the maintenance of federal programs like Social Security and Medicare.<sup>8</sup>

Latinos are also stepping in to support rural America in the 21st century. Between declining populations, retracting service availability, the opioid epidemic, and worsening outcomes for local businesses, rural America has been left behind. Against this backdrop of prolonged decline, the growing rural Latino population<sup>9</sup> is closing the gaps in the labor force both for large-scale industry and small businesses. The reality is that Latinos are fueling America's prosperity across all communities, and the federal government has a powerful opportunity to facilitate continued success for everyone.

**LATINO ENTREPRENEURS  
ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR  
NEARLY \$1 TRILLION  
IN ANNUAL REVENUE,  
EMPLOYING ALMOST  
ONE MILLION WORKERS**

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Small Business and Entrepreneurship

- **Antidiscrimination Enforcement of SBA Funds:** Latino businesses face inequitable treatment by the Small Business Administration, including during disaster recovery management.<sup>10</sup> Not only are these disparities discriminatory, but they also impose unnecessary long-term costs onto businesses and communities which are disproportionately unlikely to recovery from disasters than White-owned businesses. **Hispanic Federation enjoins the federal government to robustly enforce protection against discrimination in the allocation of essential economic resources, like small business development funding offered by the SBA.**
- Similarly, for decades, bipartisan lawmakers have recognized that persistent inequality in access to federal contracting opportunities is not only a violation of civil rights as constituted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but also undermines critical avenues for economic opportunity.<sup>11</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to vigorously enforce and expand equitable access to federal contracting opportunities.**
- **Support for CDFIs and MDIs:** Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and Minority Depository Institutions (MDIs) are vital financial apparatuses for unlocking untapped economic growth in underserved communities. Independent scholarly review has affirmed that CDFIs have proven successful at supporting financial investments and growth in economically depressed areas.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, MDIs have been shown to successfully encourage stable fiscal outlays into and within minority communities by prioritizing mission-informed financing opportunities.<sup>13</sup> **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to preserve and augment funding for these programs, to better facilitate economic growth and investment across the country.**
- **Financial Literacy and Networking Programs:** Despite clear entrepreneurial tendencies, many would-be Latino business-leaders lack both cultural capital and financial literacy to maximize their success in American marketplaces. HF and our partners have aggressively supported financial literacy, business planning, technical assistance, and business networking through our programmatic work, uplifting hundreds of small business owners and providing several hundred thousand dollars in resilience funding.<sup>14</sup> These successes underscore just how successful our community can be when connected with the right resources. Thus, **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to provide funding for business resource sharing and culturally competent financial literacy programs through schools and community-based organizations to unleash America's economy.**
- **Capital Financing Reforms:** Despite driving America's entrepreneurship and business innovation, Latinos still face unnecessary hurdles and even discrimination in obtaining capital for business ventures. Thus, we encourage Congress to mandate transparency in venture capital investment decisions while reinforcing financial and banking provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to address inequities in business lines of credit.<sup>15</sup> **Hispanic Federation similarly implores Congress to expand funding for Community Advantage Small Business Lending Companies and implement guardrails to ensure that SBA funds are equitably disbursed, including oversight into the loans awarded to ensure that Latino-owned businesses are equally accessing funding opportunities.**

**THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST ENFORCE PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN THE ALLOCATION OF ESSENTIAL ECONOMIC RESOURCES, LIKE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUNDING OFFERED BY THE SBA**

- Similarly, racially- and ethnically-targeted predatory and payday loan practices have long been acknowledged as an unethical and counterproductive drain on financial opportunities in under-banked communities.<sup>16</sup> Congress must act to regulate these practices, including by restricting predatory marketing and expanding the scope of civil rights legislation to cover hostile lending practices.
- **Community Reinvestment Act:** For decades, the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) has enjoyed bipartisan support designed to augment economic growth in American communities that risk falling behind.<sup>17</sup> In the time since its initial passage, it has been revised and amended to address contemporary needs, generally supporting its goal of boosting American economic growth.<sup>18</sup> However, it has now been almost two decades since the CRA was last meaningfully modified. **Therefore, Hispanic Federation demands that the CRA be not only reauthorized but also modernized to reflect the current composition and needs of contemporary underserved communities.**

## Workforce Protections and Labor Rights

- **Reinforcement of Workplace Protections:** HF calls for the federal government to increase enforcement of pre-existing workplace protections, expand whistleblower protections—particularly by increasing access to U-visas for those cooperating with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)—and provide incentives to those with proven track records of proactive, preemptive safety measures. New and expanded protections should be prioritized for the most dangerous industries, including agriculture, meatpacking, logistics, construction—all sectors which employ high numbers of Latinos in freight work. **Hispanic Federation entreats federal officials to support and expand these essential protections.**
- **Modernizing Workplace Protections:** Blue collar workers, including construction and farm workers are the backbone of America, producing food, fuel, pre-industrial materials, and essential infrastructure not only for our nation, but for the entire global economy. They do their work under backbreaking conditions, through harsh weather, and with minimal oversight or work-life balance. **Additionally,** widening heat waves are proving deeply hazardous to their working conditions. **Hispanic Federation exhorts the expansion of protections against dangerous heat and dehydration, as well as adequate safety lighting for any who are assigned to work in the evening to protect farmworkers from the growing dangers of changing agrarian labor conditions.**<sup>19</sup>
  - **Environmental Exposure Protections for Agriculture Workers:** Over one-third of farmworkers may be facing deleterious levels of toxic exposure stemming from workplace materials and practices.<sup>20</sup> To protect America's food supply and those who produce it, Congress, the Department of Labor and the Department of Agriculture must devise and enforce new environmental protection for farmworkers, particularly against workplace exposure to pesticides.
- **Expansion of Labor Rights:** Latinos have been integral to the history of organized labor in this country virtually from the inception of the labor movement. Pro-labor advocacy brought Americans the 40-hour work week, living wages, and necessary workplace safety protections all while guaranteeing that generations possessed the training necessary to develop the US into the modern superpower par excellence. Not only can unions secure better conditions for their members, but they also can reduce managerial overhead for employers in presenting

**THE MOST DANGEROUS INDUSTRIES, INCLUDING AGRICULTURE, MEATPACKING, LOGISTICS, CONSTRUCTION – ARE ALL SECTORS WHICH EMPLOY HIGH NUMBERS OF LATINOS IN FREIGHT WORK**

cohesive, cogent points of contact by which worker concerns may be addressed.<sup>21</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress and the administration to defend and expand labor rights, including through key guarantees to right to organization embedded within the PRO Act.**

- **Caveats Pursuant to the Jones Act:** For centuries the Jones Act, a protectionist shipping law, has exorbitantly elevated the prices of food and consumer goods in Puerto Rico. The Jones Act and parallel legislation restrict Puerto Rico's import privileges and have traditionally been supported by some who benefit from captive markets. Hispanic Federation urges Congress repeal all remaining statutes of the Jones-Shafroth Act and its successor legislation.

## Economic Opportunity and Development

- **Renew affordable and rural broadband program:** Access to affordable, reliable broadband is an urgent problem in both rural and urban communities. Businesses, families, and workers are all penalized by market forces which perpetually neglect modern infrastructure investments in America's heartland. Hispanic Federation and our partners have actively supported broadband investment under the Affordable Connectivity Program, which led to measurable increases in broadband access among poorer communities of upwards of 10% across the board.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Congress has recognized the need for additional investments in broadband and established the Digital Equity Act and BEAD Program through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. **Hispanic Federation implores Congress to authorize a similar program and maintain existing programs bringing the economic and lifestyle benefits of high-speed internet access to all US communities.**

**ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE BROADBAND IS AN URGENT PROBLEM IN BOTH RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES**

- **Trades Training:** Latino workers are highly represented in trades, including construction and logistics.<sup>23</sup> However, our community remains underrepresented at the top levels of skilled trades often tied to apprenticeships, including plumbing and electrical work.<sup>24</sup> One key path for supporting apprenticeships would be the refunding and authorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act,<sup>25</sup> advancing workforce training and apprenticeship opportunities. Regardless of legislative vehicle, **Hispanic Federation demands a modernized expansion of opportunities in trades education.**
  - **Expanded Trades Education Access:** While recent legislation expanding Pell Grants to workforce training represent a considerable step forward, there remains far more work to be done. To that end, Hispanic Federation encourages Congress to expand federal financial student aid including through Pell Grants and FAFSA-originated student loans to apprenticeship programs. In support of this goal, **Hispanic Federation calls upon the Department of Education to draft new guidelines to facilitate community colleges and especially Hispanic Serving Institutions and emerging-Hispanic Serving Institution's registration of new apprenticeship programs to increase the number of programs that qualify for federal student aid.**
    - Additionally, we support initiatives by which tradespeople who complete their apprenticeship via student loans who proceed to carry out their journeyman period in high need areas including underserved rural districts to be eligible for student loan forgiveness under Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program.
- Immigrants represent a staggeringly high rate of essential workers, including in construction, farmwork, fabrication, and maintenance; many of these essential immigrant workers are Latino.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore essential that Congress support workforce training and apprenticeship program funding that is both culturally relevant and linguistically competent for Latino and immigrant workers who are rising through trades. **Hispanic Federation entreats the launch of pilot programs with those goals in mind.**

## Taxes

- **Expand ITIN Access:** The Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) program allows those who are not eligible for social security numbers, including certain noncitizens, to file taxes and claim tax credits and deductions.<sup>27</sup> ITINs streamline the process of employment, facilitate lawful compliance with tax codes, and increase federal revenue, including for the social security administration. However, the process of obtaining an ITIN can be cumbersome and opaque transparent. Furthermore, recent federal interdepartmental policies that have expanded sharing the sharing of private, sensitive information beyond its initial purposes risk the efficacy of these programs.<sup>28</sup> **Hispanic Federation encourages the federal government to expand availability of ITIN's by creating systems by which individuals may apply to receive one, while simultaneously expanding and reinforcing data-sharing firewalls to ensure that individualized, identifying taxpayer information is accessible solely to the IRS.**
- **Expanding the Child Tax Credit:** The emergency expanded child tax credit implemented during the covid-19 pandemic proved radically successful at reducing child poverty and supporting familial spending.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, analysis by the White House Council of Economic Advisors suggests that continuing the expanded child tax credit would have lifted some three million children out of poverty.<sup>30</sup> This policy proved particularly effective at boosting standard of living for Latino families, cutting the child poverty rate from "around 20%... to 8%".<sup>31</sup> While recent legislation has modestly increased the maximum size of the credit, there is more work to be done. **As such, Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to take steps to expand the eligible population for the CTC and to ensure that all U.S. citizen children are served, regardless of how far along the immigration process their parents are.**
- **Direct File:** Hispanic Federation has seen firsthand the benefits provided by the IRS's new direct file program.<sup>32</sup> By streamlining tax filings, families are able to minimize mistakes in filing, reduce costs, and save time, all of which increase compliance with tax policies and save money for American taxpayers. Rather than undermine the Direct file Program, we urge Congress to reinvest in it. Its infrastructure is already largely established, and it would be both wasteful and convoluted to pivot away from a new, successful system. In turn, **Hispanic Federation entreats the government to universalize the direct filing program establish funding for the IRS to assess data about how people make use of the direct filing program, and thereby improve quality of service year on year.**

**CONTINUING THE EXPANDED CHILD TAX CREDIT WOULD HAVE LIFTED SOME THREE MILLION CHILDREN OUT OF POVERTY**

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### General

- Despite high levels of economic dynamism, overall Latino wages remain lower than the general population; in 2022, Latinos who worked full time for at least 50 weeks received only 78% of the median earnings of all Americans.<sup>33</sup>
- 80 percent of Americans live in counties that lost population over the past decade; local officials will increasingly feel the pinch of dwindling workforces. Shrinking tax bases have made it harder for government budgets to support essential services, such as infrastructure and public schools.
- Similarly, rural demographic analysis shows that while rural counties have faced a natural population decrease of over 100,000 since the pandemic, immigration offsets those decreases. Without immigration, over 50% of rural America would instead have faced population declines.<sup>34</sup>
- The U.S. economy, particularly in rural areas, simply will not be able to thrive without the critical immigrant labor force.
  - Likewise, the economic contribution of immigrants, who pay taxes, including Social Security payroll taxes without eligibility for federal entitlements, is helping ensure current and future retirees are receiving their full benefits.

**SHRINKING TAX BASES  
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### Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship

- Latino entrepreneurs are responsible for approximately \$800bn in annual revenue, employing almost one million workers at a total of more than \$100bn in wages per annum.<sup>35</sup>
- Nonetheless, Latino businesses endure disproportionately lower rates of approval for business loans totaling over \$50,000, even when accounting for credit history, expected business revenue and other factors, hindering our access to entrepreneurial capital.<sup>36</sup>
- Latinos also face challenges accessing venture capital; while Latino businesses comprise 10% of tech-facing firms, they received less than 1% of disbursed venture capital.<sup>37</sup>
- Hispanic Federation's programs have provided over \$7m in grants to small businesses in the last five years alone, and their successes from these grants have confirmed the power of Latino businesses when they received adequate support.<sup>38</sup>
- Latino businesses face inequitable treatment by the Small Business Administration, including during disaster recovery management.<sup>39</sup> Not only are these inequities discriminatory, but they also impose unnecessary long-term costs onto businesses and communities which are disproportionately unlikely to recovery from disasters than White-owned businesses.
- Initiatives from Stanford's business school have shown that "were it not for the constant growth in number of Latino-owned businesses during the Great Recession, there would have been fewer businesses in the United States in 2012 than there were in 2007, and the unemployment rate would have risen well over 10%."<sup>40</sup>

## Workforce Protections and Labor Rights

- Hispanic Federation's own fieldwork with visa-holding farm and food workers in North Carolina and New York confirms that individuals are often forced into illegally inadequate housing, marked by moldy sheets, cramped quarters, and dangerous pathogen exposure.
- Research and HF's own programmatic engagement show that Latinos suffer from high rates of workplace injuries. Indeed, the rate of worksite injury is higher among Latinos than any other group,<sup>41</sup> and injury rates are only increasing.<sup>42</sup>
  - These statistics map onto the number of Latinos occupied in dangerous sectors. For instance, undocumented immigrants comprise 15% of construction workers nationally; 26% of farmworkers are undocumented, while a further 14% work in production and maintenance.
- HF gained firsthand familiarity with the needs and opportunities to be gained in supporting farm and food workers through administering the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm and Food Workers Relief program.

**THE RATE OF WORKSITE INJURY IS HIGHER AMONG LATINOS THAN ANY OTHER GROUP, AND INJURY RATES ARE ONLY INCREASING**

## Economic Opportunity and Development

- The US faces a shortage of skilled tradespeople.<sup>43</sup> This shortage could be improved by increasing the availability of high-value, effective postsecondary educational trades programs, including vocational schools and apprenticeships.<sup>44</sup>
- Micro-credential programs have emerged as a compelling option to address trades shortages, allowing students to pursue specific career trajectories of interest with theoretically minimal investment.<sup>45</sup>
  - However, in-depth analysis suggests that many micro-credential programs are not as affordable as they appear, with some approaching or even surpassing the price of traditional degrees.<sup>46</sup>
- Hispanic Federation and our partners have been national leaders in supporting jobs training for underserved groups, providing training and access programs that boost salaries by over \$13k on average.<sup>47</sup>
- Hispanic Federation has been active in the fight for data equity and disaggregation, and urges the federal government to look to successful state-level programs<sup>48</sup> and as a model to move national data programs into the 21st century.
- The reported gap in broadband access between Latinos and non-Hispanic whites ranges from 1% to 15% depending on the surveyed metric.
- A larger portion of Latino households lack a personal computer than do non-Hispanic households, correlating with a greater degree of Latinos who are reliant upon smartphones for internet access than the population at large.<sup>49</sup>
- Students lacking broadband access are less likely to plan for college, while their online peers "have substantially higher digital skills."<sup>50</sup> Broadband access boosts both standard of living and economic opportunities, particularly following interventions enabling the use of multiple devices at once.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The United States enjoys the strongest economy in the world, built by a dynamic, dedicated, and innovative workforce. Latinos have emerged as an essential pillar of the American economy, powering services, industry, and entrepreneurship in rural and urban sectors alike. Maintaining American economic dominance in the 21st century requires continual investment in our workforce, and therefore, in Latinos. To support that goal, Hispanic Federation has outlined here several vital steps, including easing access to capital, protecting American workers through essential safety reforms, and a modernizing tax provisions to reflect our growing country.

American voters routinely rate the economy as one of their main priorities, with cost-of-living frequently emerging as their top concern. Lowering the cost-of-living cannot be achieved without investments in entrepreneurial, industrial, and infrastructural improvements that themselves rely on a well-trained, flexible, healthy workforce. Steps like expanded trades education, expanded community investments, and labor protections will help secure the economic opportunities required to support all Americans. Our country has a clear path to long-term prosperity. It will take collaboration between working families, small businesses and corporate leaders to work that path, and we cannot afford to leave anyone behind.

**THE U.S. ECONOMY,  
PARTICULARLY IN RURAL  
AREAS, SIMPLY WILL  
NOT BE ABLE TO THRIVE  
WITHOUT THE CRITICAL  
IMMIGRANT LABOR FORCE**

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## 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES:

# Puerto Rico

### POLICY OVERVIEW

Since 2017, Hispanic Federation has been a leader on the ground in Puerto Rico and a constant advocate in DC working towards a just, sustainable recovery from Hurricane Maria and subsequent disasters for the archipelago's 3.2 million residents. The purpose of this report is to present Hispanic Federation's federal policy priorities for Puerto Rico to promote a participatory dialogue between federal officials and the network of community-based, non-profit organizations that HF has worked with to identify these priorities.

**OUR WORK IS GUIDED BY THE PILLARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, SUSTAINABILITY, RESILIENCE, JUSTICE, AND EQUITY.**

Given the complexity of Puerto Rico's economic, social, and environmental challenges, we have adopted a holistic approach prioritizing the following federal policy areas:

- **Economic Development:** We work to promote long term economic development that will effectively balance economic opportunities with social and environmental interests. We prioritize economic development driven by the community, small businesses, and equitable access to local and federal funding.
- **Planning and Community Development:** We work to promote sustainable development, protect the right to housing, avoid displacement, and guarantee access to critical services in communities.
- **Democracy and Civic Engagement:** We strive to promote participatory, transparent, and data-based policy decision-making that respects the will of the people and fosters accountability and effective, fair use of public resources. We aim to promote and strengthen fair and free elections.
- **Agriculture and Food Security:** We work to strengthen food security, increase local production, protect the right to food, support small farmers and fishers, reduce imports, and minimize the environmental footprint of agriculture.
- **Energy and Critical Services:** We work to guarantee fair and equitable access to energy and other critical services in the most vulnerable communities, with the main goal of saving lives. We support Puerto Rico's goal to transition to 100% renewable energy and advocate to prioritize distributed solar energy that fosters resilience and energy justice.

Our work is guided by the pillars of human rights, sustainability, resilience, justice, and equity. Simultaneously, we promote essential mechanisms for good governance and accountability, such as transparency, public participation, and access to public information.

This report details Hispanic Federation's Puerto Rico federal priorities in each of the above policy areas.

## KEY FACTS AND DATES IN PUERTO RICO HISTORY:

### 1898

Puerto Rico becomes a territory of the USA as a result of Spanish-American War.

### 1917

All Puerto Ricans are granted US citizenship.

### 1901-1922

The US Supreme Court decided Insular Cases holding that the US Constitution does not apply in full to "unincorporated" U.S. territories, like PR.

### 1948

The US permits Puerto Rico to democratically elect its Governor.

### 1952

Puerto Rico ratifies its constitution and is established as a US commonwealth.

### 1960-1970

Puerto Rico's economy shifts from agriculture to manufacturing, transforming the archipelago.

### 1981

Puerto Rico loses SNAP benefits and transitions to a block grant known as the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP).

### 2016

Puerto Rico approached a financial crisis with the inability to legally service or restructure its debt. Congress imposes a federal Financial and Oversight Management Board (FOMB) on Puerto Rico. The FOMB is deeply controversial because it curtails Puerto Rico's self-governance and internal democratic processes.

### 2017

Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated Puerto Rico, causing the longest blackout in US history and the death of more than 3,000 people.

### KEY FACT

**Puerto Rico pays federal taxes, including Medicare, Social Security, self-employment, unemployment, and customs taxes.<sup>1</sup>**

### KEY FACT

**Approximately 70,000 veterans live in Puerto Rico where they are ineligible to receive the same benefits as veterans living in the states.**

### KEY FACT

**All people born in Puerto Rico are US citizens.**

## SITUATION REPORT

Since hurricane Maria in 2017, Hispanic Federation's priority in Puerto Rico has been to support a just and sustainable recovery for its **3.2 million residents**. To that end, we have invested \$57 million in private, philanthropic funding and collaborated with more than 166 community based, non-profit organizations on programs, projects and initiatives to build a stronger, more resilient Puerto Rico together. We strive to amplify the voice of historically marginalized communities and support, train, and accompany local organizations that promote human dignity, community progress, and work towards a more equitable society. See our report, [Building a Stronger and More Resilient Puerto Rico, Hurricane Maria: A Five-Years Update, September 2022](#).

The historical and current reality of Puerto Rico demands each public policy issue be addressed by confronting the political, social, and economic inequalities that have intensified the vulnerability of its residents, especially during natural disasters and emergencies, stalled sustainable development, and deepened the injustices that occur as a result. Puerto Rico has not recovered from the catastrophic onslaught of Hurricane Maria, and has since faced hurricanes, earthquakes, tropical storms, floods, and a global pandemic. Economically, residents struggle with a poverty rate of approximately **40 percent**, a median household income of just over **\$27,000** — lower than any US state<sup>2</sup> — austerity measures imposed by a non-elected federal Financial Oversight and Management Board, and limited access to federal resources. Among other things, the lack of parity in federal programs and benefits, including those designed to address the needs of low income and vulnerable populations such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Child Tax Credit (CTC), and Supplemental Social Security (SSI), serve to exacerbate these challenges, year after year.

Unfortunately, this social, environmental and economic tension has forced many families to make the difficult decision to leave Puerto Rico for the states and is a critical factor in preventing Puerto Ricans in the diaspora from returning. Over the last decade, Puerto Rico has experienced a dramatic 11.8 percent decline in population from 2010 to 2020,<sup>3</sup> with a further 2.4 percent decline from 2020 to 2023.<sup>4</sup> These statistics reflect the lived reality of more than 100 years of systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico by the federal government.

**THESE STATISTICS  
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PUERTO RICO BY THE  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.**

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Economic Development

- **Parity and equity in all federal anti-poverty programs**, such as SNAP, Medicaid, CTC, and SSI.
  - Achieve **Puerto Rico's transition from "NAP to SNAP" in the 2025 Farm Bill**: For more than 40 years low-income families, children, senior citizens, and veterans in Puerto Rico have been systemically excluded from SNAP, intensifying poverty and food insecurity in the archipelago. On average, American citizens in Puerto Rico receive 40% less nutrition benefits than the benefits received under SNAP in 48 states and D.C. Under the NAP block grant, Puerto Rico's nutrition aid and program enrollment does not increase based on need as would be the case under SNAP. As American citizens, those living in Puerto Rico deserve the same access to vital funding for nutrition programs. **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to pass either the Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Fairness Act (HR 5168) or to include language advancing Puerto Rico's Transition from NAP to SNAP within the 2025 Farm Bill to correct the inequities forced on Puerto Rico since 1981.**
  - **Prevent the reduction of Medicaid funds in 2027**: Medicaid in Puerto Rico has been woefully underfunded for decades. The consequences of this historic inequity can be seen in Puerto Rico's deteriorating health care infrastructure and has contributed to the archipelago's ongoing economic and public health crisis. **Hispanic Federation demands that Congress intervene to prevent a massive reduction in Medicaid funds to Puerto Rico in 2027.**
  - **Parity for the Child Tax Credit**: The enhanced Child Tax Credit has proven incredibly successful at reducing poverty throughout the United States. However, residents of Puerto Rico are subjected to harsher terms than those residing in the rest of the United States. **As such, Hispanic Federation asks Congress to change the Child Tax Credit parameters so that there is parity for taxpayers who reside in Puerto Rico.**
- **Eliminate federal policies and bureaucratic barriers that prevent local nonprofit organizations and small businesses from accessing federal funds and programs.**
  - **Hispanic Federation enjoins federal agencies to eliminate cost-matching requirements for federal awards when the primary applicant is a nonprofit organization or eligible government agency**, and the projects primarily serve and directly benefit residents of low-income disadvantaged communities, US territories and/or tribal communities.
  - Furthermore, **we encourage Congress to add language to the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations allowing direct disbursement of funds ("drawing down") to organizations with a positive track record of compliance, execution, and impact on communities.**

**FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS  
LOW-INCOME FAMILIES,  
CHILDREN, SENIOR  
CITIZENS, AND VETERANS  
IN PUERTO RICO HAVE  
BEEN SYSTEMICALLY  
EXCLUDED FROM SNAP**

## Planning and Community Development

- Federal Disaster Emergency Response and Recovery
  - **Hispanic Federation urges the passage of legislation and appropriations to maintain and improve the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**
  - In the face of future emergencies, there is an urgent need to reestablish Language Access policies in all emergency response and disaster recovery related agencies. **Hispanic Federation strongly recommends FEMA to translate the updated Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG) into Spanish and any other relevant language for communities in the US.**
  - Together with FEMA we can expand local non-profit organizational capacity to prepare and support communities during disasters. **To support this goal, Hispanic Federation exhorts FEMA to preserve and expand the “PR FEMA Working Group” as a space for dialogue and collaboration between local non-profit organizations and FEMA.**
  - Likewise, **Hispanic Federation exhorts the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to create a “PR HUD Working Group” in direct collaboration with local nonprofit organizations.**

**IN THE FACE OF FUTURE EMERGENCIES, THERE IS AN URGENT NEED TO REESTABLISH LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICIES IN ALL EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND DISASTER RECOVERY RELATED AGENCIES.**

## Democracy and Civic Engagement

- **Hispanic Federation demands Congress pass legislation sunsetting the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) and the Financial Oversight and Management Board, concomitant with a transparent and independent review of the board's actions and ensuring a responsible transition of control and information to the government of Puerto Rico.**
- We advocate for the elimination of barriers that prevent our communities from being counted in the 2030 CENSUS. Additionally, **Hispanic Federation encourages the Census Bureau to obtain better economic data about Puerto Rico and to ensure that Puerto Rico is included in the “American Housing Survey.”**
- **Overrule the Insular Cases that legally support the federal government's systemic discrimination against Puerto Rico.**
- **Reestablish Language Access policies in all federal agencies.**

## Energy and Critical Services

- Maintain and increase support from relevant federal agencies (DOE, EPA, FEMA and HUD) to achieve the transition to 100% renewable energy, prioritizing solar energy that promotes resilience and energy justice in Puerto Rico. To that end, **Hispanic Federation asks Congress to reestablish and protect federal renewable energy tax credits and expand access to PR.**

## Agriculture and Food Security

- **Hispanic Federation demands that USDA and NOAA increase the provision of resources and technical support to farmers and fishermen in Puerto Rico.**
- **Hispanic Federation demands that Congress pass legislation repealing the Jones Act which causes undue burdens on shipping and the price of goods and services.<sup>5,6</sup>**

### CONCLUSION

Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States must be guided by the principles of respect and human dignity. Therefore, Puerto Rico's ongoing disaster recovery and sustainable development efforts should be effectively supported by the federal government. Among other things, ensuring parity and equity in all federal anti-poverty programs, respecting Puerto Rico's goal to transition to 100% renewable energy, and providing language access in federal programs and services are essential policies moving forward.

Each step of the way, Hispanic Federation has worked alongside our community based and nonprofit organizations network in Puerto Rico. Also, we believe that working collectively with Puerto Rico's government, federal agencies, and other diverse stakeholders will achieve balanced and effective policy changes and decision-making. As a leading organization in the US with significant impact on the archipelago, we reaffirm our commitment to collaborate with the federal government in everything that promotes Puerto Rico's well-being and reassures its citizens' strengths and dignity.

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### Economic Development

- For decades, U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico receive unequal treatment when it comes to funding for lifesaving federal programs such as Medicaid, SSI, SNAP and CTC.
- Puerto Rico previously participated in the SNAP program; however, in 1981, Congress placed the archipelago under a federally capped block grant, known as the Nutrition Assistance Program or NAP.
- Currently, the SNAP maximum monthly benefits in the states/D.C. average 40% higher than NAP benefits in Puerto Rico. Likewise, the SNAP benefits are 100% higher in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam.
- The Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) in Puerto Rico is statutorily set at 55 percent, and even though there is currently an increase to 76 percent through September 2027 (P.L. 117-328), the Puerto Rico FMAP would revert to 55 percent if no additional Congressional action were taken before the end of 2027. This statutory rollback cannot be permitted to pass.<sup>7</sup>
- More archipelago residents have migrated to the U.S. mainland in the 5 years from 2010 to 2015 than at any time since the Great Puerto Rican Migration after World War II.

### Energy and Critical Services

- Puerto Rico law mandates a complete transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050.<sup>8</sup>

### Agriculture and Food Security

- Food in Puerto Rico costs twice as much as it does in Florida. The Jones Act does not apply exclusively to Puerto Rico and also makes goods shipped to states like Alaska and Hawaii more expensive. Efforts to exempt Puerto Rico from the law, even in times of crisis, have been short lived.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Espacios Abiertos, Does Puerto Rico Really Not Pay Federal Taxes? <https://espaciosabiertos.org/facts-does-puerto-rico-really-not-pay-federal-taxes-a-common-misconception/>
- 2 [https://data.census.gov/profile/Puerto\\_Rico?q=040XX00US72#income-and-poverty](https://data.census.gov/profile/Puerto_Rico?q=040XX00US72#income-and-poverty)
- 3 <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/puerto-rico.html#:~:text=Puerto%20Rico%20Population%20Declined%201.8%25%20From%202010%20to%202020&text=America%20Counts%20today%20launches%20a,your%20county%20on%20one%20page>. (Accessed 5/2/25).
- 4 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/PR.sanjuanmunicipiopiuertorico.sanjuanzonaurbanapuertorico> (Accessed 5/2/25).
- 5 <https://www.hispanicfederation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Take-Action-PR-Toolkit-2022.pdf> (Accessed 5/2/25.)
- 6 [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/60f311e9e2e57d523d28bba2/66f6dc7b90950f3fe5c409ca\\_2014-Nuestra\\_Agenda.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/60f311e9e2e57d523d28bba2/66f6dc7b90950f3fe5c409ca_2014-Nuestra_Agenda.pdf) (Accessed 5/2/25)
- 7 See: [2024 Annual Report to Congress Public Law 117-328: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Government of Puerto Rico, Department of Health, Puerto Rico Medicaid Program, October 2024](#). (Accessed 5/2/25.)
- 8 <https://bvirtualogp.pr.gov/ogp/Bvirtual/leyesreferencia/PDF/2-ingles/17-2019.pdf> (Accessed 5/2/25).
- 9 <https://www.hispanicfederation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Take-Action-PR-Toolkit-2022.pdf> (Accessed 5/2/25.)

# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Education

*“You have a chance with your energy and your ideas to imagine a better world than the one we have created. You can only do that by education, by learning about civics, by learning about your government and how you can effect change. But more importantly you can do it with your energy, with your desire and passion to build that better world.”*

**–Sonia Sotomayor<sup>1</sup>**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A quality education is at once a pathway to social mobility, a glue that binds together our communities, and the key to understanding our pasts while building our futures. The American public education system is arguably our nation's single most optimistic and effective investment in American democracy and prosperity. The contemporary public school system is built upon the belief that well-funded facilities, combined with quality teachers and supportive communities, can bring together students of any background and produce world-class scholars, peerless craftsmen, and engaged citizens to strengthen our nation. It is this dream that drives Latino communities across the country to strive for access to and success within K-12 and higher education.

Hispanic Federation is committed to working with legislative and executive partners to develop the strengths of American education while addressing its shortcomings. And as the fastest growing cohort of primary, secondary, and postsecondary students, Latino students are at the epicenter of these challenges and opportunities. HF and our organizational partners have boundless experience in educational programming, preparing us to lead on advancing a national agenda for equitable education for Latinos. Going forward, legislators and administrators alike must commit to an educational landscape that is accessible, nondiscriminatory, and empowers students on their educational and career journeys.

**LEGISLATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS ALIKE MUST COMMIT TO AN EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE THAT IS ACCESSIBLE, NONDISCRIMINATORY, AND EMPOWERS STUDENTS ON THEIR EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER JOURNEYS**

Our agenda urges sustainable pathways to higher education, like the implementation of a universal FAFSA. These proposed changes should not only be limited to traditional collegiate education, but also incorporate and expand access to increasingly popular trades programs and apprenticeships. Financial access to postsecondary education must be paired with cultural and linguistic access through student support services and diversity of staff, faculty, leadership, and curriculum to ensure fair access to opportunity. Furthermore, we exhort research and aid funding that will maximize the quality of education afforded to Latino students, as well as all Americans.

## SITUATION REPORT

Equitable access to public education has been a guarantee since the Supreme Court struck down the false principle of 'separate but equal' in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.<sup>2</sup> That case, built upon the judicial foundation of *Mendez v. Westminster*, affirmed our national commitment to true equality in education. When underserved students are given equitable access to resources, opportunities, and cultural support, they achieve greater educational attainment and greater success. However, public school systems that largely serve Latino pupils face more significant funding shortfalls than do predominantly non-Hispanic white districts,<sup>3</sup> likely exacerbating gaps in educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there remain significant hurdles to closing the gaps in both affordability and attainment in collegiate education. For instance, while enrollment in 2-year degree programs by Latinos has increased steadily over the years,<sup>5</sup> our community's degree completion rate for 2-year programs has plateaued.<sup>6</sup> The failure of our nation's 2-year degree programs and institutions to adequately support Latinos is reflective of an educational misalignment between needs and resources, and deprives Latinos nationwide of an essential avenue for economic mobility that is particularly acute for nontraditional and poorer students. Reasons for these institutional failures are not difficult to find; research consistently validates that the core obstacle to degree completion for Latino students is cost, driving home just how essential proper resourcing is.<sup>7</sup>

**PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS THAT LARGELY SERVE LATINO PUPILS FACE MORE SIGNIFICANT FUNDING SHORTFALLS THAN DO PREDOMINANTLY NON-HISPANIC WHITE DISTRICTS, LIKELY EXACERBATING GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES**

Nevertheless, the Latino community has made great strides in advancing educational attainment. From 1996 to 2021, Latino high school graduation rates increased by over 30 percentage points.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Latino higher educational outcomes are steadily advancing. Approximately 33 percent of Latino 18-24 year-olds have been enrolled in postsecondary education in recent years, with Latino students comprising a roughly proportionate number of undergraduate students as they do the overall population.<sup>9</sup> Over the same period, Latino 6-year degree completion rates for baccalaureate programs has reached almost 60 percent.<sup>10</sup> All the while, the number of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI's) has grown remarkably.<sup>11</sup> Latino students and families are clearly able to achieve tremendous educational success when provided with sufficient resources and supported by institutions that take their dreams and challenges seriously. Nevertheless, the situation is precarious. Despite improvements, Latinos remain educationally underserved, even when accounting for socioeconomic status. Simultaneously, the federal government is on the brink of a generational pullback in its defense of educational civil rights, while federal funding for critical education initiatives is under increasing threat. These shifts not only jeopardize recent gains but also imperil the entire project of educational equality. With Latino students poised to play an outsized role in our nation's success for generations to come, it is imperative that the federal government embrace education policies that work for our communities.

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### K12 Education

- **K12 desegregation:** **Hispanic Federation urges the Executive Branch to vigorously enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the spirit in which it was intended, including through the revitalization of active integration programs for districts whose outstanding rates of *de facto* segregation are particularly egregious.** Likewise, we encourage Congress to explore offering favorable grants to those districts proactively conducting integration operations to defray those associated costs.
- **No public money for private schools:** **Hispanic Federation urges lawmakers to reject the growing movement to funnel public money to private schools.** While we recognize why privatization and voucher programs hold appeal to some families, it is nevertheless the case that such programs inherently ask all public schools to make do with less.<sup>12</sup> America's public schools must be empowered to succeed for all students, irrespective of household income.
- **Latine Studies:** Our work on the Latine Studies curriculum in New York City is grounded in evidence suggesting that students benefit from critically-engaged courses exploring both their own cultures and histories, and those of others.<sup>13</sup> **We exhort Congress to expand support for Latine Studies curricula across the country, and particularly to pursue measures that would see Latine Studies taken up by CollegeBoard as an AP class, just like AP African American Studies.**
- **Trio Programs:** For decades, the programs collectively grouped under the TRIO umbrella have served as the unsung lynchpin of federal efforts to boost educational outcomes for the nation's vulnerable and marginalized youth.<sup>14</sup> With studies repeatedly affirming that direct and indirect costs of attendance are among the steepest barriers Latinos face to college attainment, the TRIO programs are a vital tool to ensuring that all of America's pupils have a fair shot at higher education. As such, the revitalization of TRIO programs would alleviate financial constraints in accessing counseling, extracurriculars, and talent-tracking that pave the way to robust education at flagship universities. In turn, restoring and expanding TRIO programs would help reduce time-to-degree, further reducing the financial costs of higher education.<sup>15</sup> Counterintuitively, TRIO programs across the country have faced freezes or cuts to their federal funding, and the future of the program is far from certain.<sup>16</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to affirmatively reauthorize and robustly fund TRIO programs.**
- **CEP/School Meal Access:** Since its initial introduction in 2014, the expansion of the National School Lunch program authorized under the Community Eligibility Provision has paved the way for over 50,000 schools across the country to extend no-cost meals to all students.<sup>17</sup> Research has persistently demonstrated that the expansion of school meals broadly, and through the CEP specifically, boosts school attendance, increases key health metrics, and is positively correlated with educational outcomes. The program has proven particularly effective at augmenting Latino test scores.<sup>18</sup> **Hispanic Federation therefore advises Congress to protect and further strengthen CEP through expanding programs that contribute to the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) and by lowering the minimum ISP floor for qualification.**
- **Afterschool and Wraparound Programs:** Across the country, educational outcomes continue to lag key targets.<sup>19</sup> One of the major, seemingly intractable, obstacles standing between American pupils and educational success is lingering chronic absenteeism.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, there already exists a time-tested way to reduce absenteeism while strengthening academic

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performance—afterschool and wraparound programs. For instance, comparative research reviews demonstrate that afterschool programs are correlated with improvements in student relationships with school, increased attendance, and reduced behavioral challenges.<sup>21</sup>

**Hispanic Federation urges Congress to expand funding for community-based afterschool and wraparound programs to revitalize American classrooms.**

- **Preserve the ED:** The creation in 1980 of the United States Department of Education (ED) was a signal recognition of the essential role of education in the political, economic, and cultural development of the United States. For mere pennies on the dollar of the federal budget<sup>22</sup> the ED has bolstered educational attainment across the country, with most resources going to marginalized students and communities, from inner cities to divested rural counties.<sup>23</sup> Its programs have buttressed access to opportunity and development across the country. **Hispanic Federation demands that Congress and the Administration take every available measure to fully fund and support the mission of the Department of Education to ensure the prosperity of future generations.**
  - **Restore the National Center for Education Statistics:** Effective information is a prerequisite for effective governance, with programs at the scale of those operated by the ED relying upon access to high quality, regular, reliable statistics.<sup>24</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary producer of these statistics, and their work has been essential in effectively directing resources toward the most vulnerable populations in the ways that they can be best utilized.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, officials have recently moved to heavily cut the NCES, undermining this work.<sup>26</sup> **Hispanic Federation calls upon Congress to appropriate funding to reverse these cuts and restore to NCES the capacity to fulfill its informational mission.**
  - **Maintain Title I Funding:** Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act, has provided funding for marginalized and vulnerable school systems for decades, serving as a vital safety net for schools in areas with the steepest levels of economic deprivation.<sup>27</sup> While the program has encountered obstacles over the years, it has nonetheless been routinely recognized as a lynchpin in the fight for educational opportunity.<sup>28</sup> **As such, Hispanic Federation demands Congress maintain and expand appropriations for Title I to ensure it can continue its longstanding mission.**
- **Funding for English Language Learners:** English Language Learners (ELLs) are one of, if not the, fastest growing cohorts of students in American classrooms.<sup>29</sup> Research perennially demonstrates that well-funded differentiated learner programs, grounded in linguistically competent and culturally relevant pedagogy, are crucial in ensuring that ELL's can achieve their educational potential<sup>30</sup> and are able to reap the collective benefits of mixed-nativity classrooms.<sup>31</sup> **As such, Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to reauthorize and expand appropriations for differentiated learners.**

## Higher Education

- **Enrollment Access:** College enrollments remain less diverse than the population at large, a problem that seems only to have worsened following changes in admissions practices in the aftermath of *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*.<sup>32</sup> These intertwined challenges require delicate solutions the likes of which Hispanic Federation and our partners have considerable experience between programs like *CREAR Futuros*—a peer-mentor program that recruits qualified Latinx students in participating educational institutions to mentor, guide, and support younger students, or mentees—and the Advance Change Together (ACT) initiative—focused on strengthening Latinx LGBTQ+ nonprofits across the country that serve as critical lifelines for our communities.

  - **We encourage the federal government to clearly delineate the non-discriminatory, pro-diversity options outlined in the SFFA-ruling, preserving a clear path for fair access to college for all students regardless of racial- or ethnic background.**
  - **Similarly, we urge postsecondary institutions to organize and reinforce Title IV nondiscriminatory programs that target underserved and under-resourced communities, including reinforcing K-12 to college pipelines and increasing financial aid for these communities, especially from local populations with whom institutions seek to bolster connections.**<sup>33</sup>
- **Universal FAFSA:** The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is an essential tool in connecting America's postsecondary students with opportunities for financial aid, not only directly from the federal government, but also from other sources. In New York State, Hispanic Federation worked alongside the state legislature to implement the Universal FAFSA, thereby ensuring that all students are automatically connected with potential aid opportunities not only from Pell Grants and student loans, but also at the schools to which they qualify. **In light of the successes seen in New York, Hispanic Federation urges the adoption of a nation-wide universal FAFSA.**
- **DEIA and Higher Education:** Research in recent years has underscored the ongoing benefits of formal policies in higher education supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Such policies boost student wellbeing,<sup>34</sup> research applicability and innovativeness,<sup>35</sup> and help maintain legal requirements under legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act.<sup>36</sup> Recent federal attempts to unwind Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) programs are therefore misguided and likely to stymie higher educational outcomes. **As such, Hispanic Federation urges the federal government take steps to support DEIA initiatives, both through clear guidance advancing their priorities, and through direct appropriations.**
- **Safeguards against weaponization of Title VI:** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a hard-won product of the Civil Rights Movement, prohibiting racial discrimination in the disbursement of federal funds.<sup>37</sup> Its application to the public education system has played a crucial role in ensuring the desegregation of the nation's higher education landscape.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, there remains considerable work to be done in achieving the aims of Title VI, particularly with regard to disparate impact concerns.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, recent executive action has risked undermining and even reversing the gains made under Title VI, under a questionably legal basis.<sup>40</sup> **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress to take steps to ensure that Title VI is enforced in keeping with its original legislative intent through directed appropriations and clarifying language.**
- **Political Neutrality in Grant Funding:** For the better part of a century, the United States has led the world in scientific, cultural, and humanistic research by direct support that reliably promoted innovation without ideological intervention. Recent federal actions conditioning federal funding upon alignment with ideological agendas risk undermining a key factor in the global research dominance enjoyed by America's institutions of higher learning since World War II.<sup>41</sup> **Hispanic Federation implores Congress take steps to indemnify research appropriations from such direct, ideological interventions, ensuring that good research proceed unimpeded.**

- **HSI Board:** Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI's) represent roughly 20 percent of all colleges and universities and enroll nearly two-thirds of the nation's Latino undergraduates.<sup>42</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges the Administration to restore funding to HSI's and to renew the creation of the HSI board to facilitate coordination between these hundreds of institutions and the administration.**<sup>43</sup>
  - Additionally, recent convenings of leaders in higher education confirm that innovators are increasingly looking beyond enrollment to success.<sup>44</sup> **To that end, Hispanic Federation advises any HSI board to develop a third metric acknowledging programs that achieve success in Latino educational attainment, and not just enrollment.**
- **Public Service Loan Forgiveness:** Since its inception in 2007, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program has facilitated the forgiveness of approximately \$60bn in student loan debt from nearly one million borrowers.<sup>45</sup> In exchange, these borrowers dedicate themselves to careers of public service whether in federal, state, or local government, or in one of the millions of service-based nonprofit organizations operating in communities across the country. Furthermore, the resultant reduction in loan debt contributes to increased local economic growth by easing credit, elevating consumer activity, boosting entrepreneurial initiatives, and even easing pathways to major life milestones.<sup>46</sup> **Hispanic Federation demands that Congress take steps to ensure that the original intent of PSLF is protected and remains free of ideological overreach and burdens.**
- **Graduate Student Loan Caps:** Recent legislation has imposed new caps on federal student loans for graduate education with only a few exceptions for certain professional degrees. Essential service workers like health care providers, including nurse practitioners and physician assistants, teachers, and social workers are not included among these exemptions, risking worsening America's shortage of primary care providers.<sup>47</sup> **Hispanic Federation advises the federal government to enact regulatory definitions or legislation expanding the list of exempted degrees to include vital careers like those in front-line health care.**
- **Expansion of Federal Financial Student Aid:** A college degree remains one of the most reliable pathways for generational social mobility.<sup>48</sup> Even amid rising tuition costs, statistics from the St. Louis Fed suggest that degrees maintain double-digit returns on investment.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, cost is routinely cited as the number one barrier between Latino undergraduate students and degree completion.<sup>50</sup> Thus, tuition assistance is vital for addressing ongoing inequities in higher educational attainment. **Hispanic Federation implores Congress pass legislation adding new pathways and terms for federal financial student aid.**

**A COLLEGE DEGREE  
REMAINS ONE OF  
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## Non-Traditional and Trades Education

- **Apprenticeships and Trades Education:** Latino workers are highly represented in trades, including construction and logistics.<sup>51</sup> However, our community remains underrepresented at the top levels of those skilled trades often tied to apprenticeships, including plumbing and electrical work.<sup>52</sup> One key path for supporting apprenticeships would be the refunding and authorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act,<sup>53</sup> which promotes workforce training and apprenticeship opportunities for low- and middle-income communities.
  - **Expanded Trades Education Access:** While recent legislation expanding Pell Grants to workforce training represents a considerable leap in expanding access to trades education, there remains far more work to be done. **To that end, Hispanic Federation encourages Congress to expand additional categories of federal apprenticeship programs and other forms of trade education.**
  - In support of this goal, **Hispanic Federation calls upon the Department of Education to draft new guidelines to facilitate community colleges (and especially Hispanic Serving Institutions and emerging-Hispanic Serving Institution's) registration of new apprenticeship programs to increase the number of programs that qualify for federal student aid.**
    - Additionally, we support initiatives by which tradespeople who complete their apprenticeship via student loans and subsequently fulfill their journeyman period in high need areas—including underserved rural districts—would become eligible for student loan forgiveness under Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program.
    - **Clarification of Workforce Pell:** Recent legislation extending provision of Pell Grants to those involved in trades education marked a long-awaited step in expanding access to federal financial support to those training for some of America's most needed jobs. However, the subsequent rulemaking process has exposed otherwise good policy to potentially haphazard guidance.<sup>54</sup> **Hispanic Federation urges the federal government to implement regulatory guidance and any necessary legislative clarifications to ensure that supported programs do not instead become gateways to fraudulent provision of meaningless credentials,<sup>55</sup> while allowing clear, accountable pathways for waivers for select pilot programs.**

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### General

- Unfortunately, poorer, minority, and immigrant households all suffer from a dearth of cultural and academic capital, hindering educational outcomes.<sup>56</sup>
  - Hispanic Federation's educational programs are precisely targeted at these challenges through opportunities like the Pathways program, Immigrants' Welcome and *CREAR Junior* which create opportunities for families to gain expertise and academic capital to expand their avenues for success.
  - For instance, HF's *CREAR Futuros* Program successfully increases educational retention rates by significant thresholds according to independent review.<sup>57</sup>

### K12 Education

- Schools across the country are facing shortfalls in funding.<sup>58</sup>
  - These budgetary gaps affect supplies,<sup>59</sup> curriculum procurement, including for advanced placement and international baccalaureate classes,<sup>60</sup> and teachers in general.<sup>61</sup>
  - Research perennially demonstrates that increased school funding is correlated with improved educational attainment,<sup>62</sup> and in the current underfunded landscape, funneling money from public to private schools will simply serve to undermine the core educational system that serves the vast majority of Americans.<sup>63</sup>
- Since the 1990s, *de facto* public-school segregation has been increasing,<sup>64</sup> a trend that is a direct consequence of school district gerrymandering and selective district investments.<sup>65</sup>
  - School segregation is not only an embarrassing relic of Jim Crow sensibilities, but also reduces educational success across subjects from English to Math, and attainment for all students, regardless of economic background and race.<sup>66</sup>
- Evidence suggests that students benefit from critically-engaged courses exploring both their own cultures and histories and those of others, buttressing our work on the Latine Studies curriculum in New York City.<sup>67</sup>

**FUNNELING MONEY FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS WILL SIMPLY SERVE TO UNDERMINE THE CORE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT SERVES THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS**

### Higher Education

- Hispanic Federation and our partners have long worked to connect students with funding and aid opportunities, confirming for us that solutions exist both in current aid and in programs within reach.
- Representation on college campuses is currently lacking across multiple metrics. While colleges and universities are growing increasingly diverse,<sup>68</sup> university administrators lack the capacity to engage with diverse student bodies including first-generation, immigrant, racial/ethnic minority, and LGBTQ+ students in culturally competent ways. Simultaneously, college enrollments remain less diverse than the population at large, a problem that seems only to have worsened following changes in admissions practices in the aftermath of *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*.<sup>69</sup>

- Furthermore, Latino faculty comprise only 6.4 percent of total faculty nationwide according to statistics from the Department of Education.<sup>70</sup>
- Studies have repeatedly vindicated the role of cultural offices on college campuses that support diversity and senses of belonging in boosting educational outcomes and even health metrics.<sup>71</sup> Postsecondary institutions should be encouraged to continue the vital work of these offices so long as they comport with Title IV nondiscrimination policies, and to work with community partners to ensure that these missions actually advance their stated goals.
- Increased enrollment has not necessarily correlated with increased attainment rates; the degree completion gap, for instance, remains extreme, *particularly* for 2-year degree programs.<sup>72</sup>
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) are currently enjoying a renaissance in enrollment and support and are reaping considerable benefits, including Howard's attainment of R1 status.<sup>73</sup>
  - These successes come as recent Presidential administrations have maintained advisory boards relating HBCU-facing questions.<sup>74</sup>
  - A recent executive order would have created parallel board overseeing Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI's) and emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions (e-HSI's), however that order's measures have been effectively rescinded.<sup>75</sup>
  - In turn, recent federal actions have led to cuts amounting to hundreds of millions in grant funding for HIS's.<sup>76</sup>
- In 2016, seventy-four percent of Latino students applied for federal financial aid, almost two-thirds of whom qualified for a Pell Grant.<sup>77</sup>
  - Unfortunately, Pell Grants seldom cover all outstanding need, leaving students to figure out how to meet the remaining gaps themselves. HF and our partners have long worked to connect students with funding and aid opportunities through programs like *CREAR Futuros*, with effective results.
- While financial literacy plays a role in debt aversion, recent studies demonstrate that a desire to avoid saddling family members with potential debt should unforeseen circumstances interfere with educational plans play a much larger role, illustrating just how essential robust, wraparound funding and financial support plans are.<sup>78</sup>

**IN 2016, 74% OF LATINO STUDENTS APPLIED FOR FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID, ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF WHOM QUALIFIED FOR A PELL GRANT**

### Trades and Non-traditional Education

- Nontraditional students<sup>79</sup> face numerous barriers in reaching their educational goals, whether attaining their GED to a trade certificate or a graduate degree.<sup>80</sup> However, with non-traditional students comprising anywhere from 30 percent to 40 percent of the post-secondary student population depending on definition,<sup>81</sup> it is imperative that Congress act to support this increasingly vital component of our educational system.
- The US faces a shortage of skilled tradespeople,<sup>82</sup> and the impact of that shortage worsened by the lack of high-value, effective postsecondary educational trades programs, including vocational schools and apprenticeships.<sup>83</sup>
  - These obstacles are such that they outweigh Gen Z's decisive interest in and shift toward trades training.<sup>84</sup>

- Micro-credential programs have emerged as a compelling option to address the shortage of skilled tradespeople, allowing students to pursue specific career trajectories of interest with theoretically minimal investment.<sup>85</sup>
  - However, in-depth analysis suggests that many micro-credential programs are not as affordable as they appear, with some approaching or even surpassing the price of traditional degrees.<sup>86</sup>

### CONCLUSION

An educated electorate is the lifeblood of any democracy, and a skilled, trained workforce is the backbone of any economy. Political leaders from the earliest days of the United States recognized how essential an effective education system would be. Our national story has arguably been one of the gradual expansion of educational opportunities to all its people, to prodigious results. While Latinos have not always been given the spotlight in this story, our communities have nonetheless been at its center. Cases like *Mendez et al v. Westminster* accelerated anti-discriminatory activism in the U.S. and spurred collective cooperation within the broader U.S. Civil Rights Movement., paving the way to *Brown v. Board of Education*. The pursuit of equal access to a quality education for ourselves and our children has therefore been an essential part of the story of education in America.

However, the federal government's leadership in this story is relatively new. Coming on the heels of the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the embrace of a federal role in supporting a nationwide, universal policy for the intellectual and personal development of America's youth was the optimistic culmination of a centuries' long movement stretching from Plymouth rock to common schools. The subsequent creation of educational civil rights law, broad tools to expand resourcing to underprivileged groups and institutions, and the Education Department itself have been tremendously successful at supporting the educational component of the American Dream. This work however has not been enough; re-segregation is a growing scourge in America's classrooms, and access to academic and fiscal capital continue to hinder educational outcomes, to say nothing of the attempted dismantling of successful initiatives. Past successes demonstrate that America's families, teachers, and students have every ability to flourish given the resources and opportunities—and it is imperative our nation's government fully support and encourage this growth for the sake of the future of this country.

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# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Environmental Justice

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“If we destroy nature blindly, it is a boomerang which will be our undoing.”  
—George Melendez Wright.<sup>1</sup>*

It is clear that shifting weather patterns are bringing a greater array of disastrous climatic events to the United States. The last calendar year alone has seen devastating wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and flash flooding events that have strained state, local, federal, and philanthropic resources. These disasters have compounded preexisting environmental risks, amplifying potential harm from pollution, inadequate access to safe outdoor spaces, and insufficient municipal infrastructure. Latinos are at an environmental disadvantage in the United States that is only aggravated by culturally- and linguistically-unfavorable support systems. Rectifying these disadvantages will strengthen communities, expand economies at the local and national level, and save lives. Doing so, however, will require everything from broad investments into novel energy solutions, to federal partnerships with municipal authorities and community organizations to develop healthy neighborhood spaces. In exchange though, our families and the country at large will be rewarded with more resilient, productive, and stable communities.

Since 2017, Hispanic Federation has played a leading role supporting local communities in Puerto Rico, Florida, North Carolina, California, and the Dominican Republic respond and recover from natural disasters, oftentimes leading the way in disaster recovery efforts in times of crisis—even before government intervention. Through programs like LA Ayuda, Hispanic Federation has connected vulnerable community members with the flexible, timely resources they need to maximize individual, household, and community recoveries.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, HF’s work does not start and end with recovery work. Instead, we are committed to the long-term resiliency and empowerment of communities across Puerto Rico, Florida, North Carolina, and the rest of the United States. This commitment informs our policy agenda and recommendations, which consider the environment—both its reach and its consequences—capaciously. We lay out here a vision for advancing place-based justice, increasing the reach of renewable energy, and developing a more equitable and therefore effective disaster preparation and recovery process.

**WE LAY OUT HERE A VISION FOR ADVANCING PLACE-BASED JUSTICE, INCREASING THE REACH OF RENEWABLE ENERGY, AND DEVELOPING A MORE EQUITABLE AND THEREFORE EFFECTIVE DISASTER PREPARATION AND RECOVERY PROCESS**

## SITUATION REPORT

Between scorching temperatures, devastating hurricanes, and unpredictable local weather, it's clear that climate change in some form or fashion has arrived. The coming years and decades will produce incredible—in some cases insurmountable—challenges, but growing investment in tackling environmental challenges, from angles ranging from the psychological to the geological, provides great opportunities as well. A Pew survey from 2021 highlights striking environmentalist sentiment within the Latino community compared to the U.S. population at large.<sup>3</sup> At a top level, ~20 percent more U.S. Latinos stated that “addressing global climate change” was either an important or top concern, compared to the non-Latino community. Climate and the environment are clearly issues of major concerns to the Latino community.

It is no surprise that Latinos are concerned about climate change given that our community stands to suffer much of its brunt. From 2001 to 2011, “five times as many people were affected by natural catastrophes as was the case from 1960 to 1970.”<sup>4</sup> Over that period, virtually all hurricanes and tropical storms which caused severe damage to US communities impacted communities with a high density of Latinos.<sup>5</sup> In 2021, the EPA produced a comprehensive report on expected consequences of climate change across the United States at the thresholds of 2°C and 4°C above previous temperatures.<sup>6</sup> The report suggests the Latino community is more vulnerable than any other racial-ethnic group in the United States under extreme climate change scenarios.<sup>7</sup>

**LATINOS ARE NOT ONLY MORE LIKELY TO BE EXPOSED TO POLLUTION, BUT ALSO THAT THIS EXPOSURE CAN BE LINKED TO INCREASED DISEASE PREVALENCE WITHIN THE LATINO COMMUNITY**

Climate risks are compounded by hazards in our local communities. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that Latinos are not only more likely to be exposed to pollution, but also that this exposure can be linked to increased disease prevalence within the Latino community.<sup>8</sup> These risks are only worsened for those working in dangerous fields like construction or farmwork.<sup>9</sup> From municipal challenges, to widening disasters, and potential climate breakdown, Latinos are on the front lines of environmental justice.

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Local Environment

- **Pollution remediation:** Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that Latinos face greater exposure to potentially harmful air pollution, leading to increased disease prevalence in the Latino community.<sup>10</sup> Increased federal funding intended specifically for Latino communities to redress disproportionate contamination levels offers a clear and direct road to improvement.<sup>11</sup> Congress must fund enhanced detection and cleanup programs for environmental pollutants, including more novel threats like PFAS. Remediation must include implementation of robust federal standards for pollution in consultation with leading community figures.
- **Farmworker Pesticide protections:** Over one-third of farmworkers may be facing deleterious levels of toxic exposure stemming from the workplace.<sup>12</sup> To protect America's food supply and those who produce it, Congress and the Departments of Labor and Agriculture must devise and enforce new environmental protection for farmworkers, particularly against workplace exposure to pesticides. Hispanic Federation demands the passage of new environmental laws and regulations to ensure the health of those whose work provides food to American families.
- **Exposomic Research Funding:** Barely a decade after the Human Genome Project was completed, physicians, epigeneticists, toxicologists, and epidemiologists have embraced the task of uncovering a person's lifelong environmental exposure—their exposome.<sup>13</sup> There exists bipartisan sentiment that it is past time that the federal government do more to protect Americans from the health consequences of chemical exposure.<sup>14</sup> Exposomic research offers lawmakers, industries, and community groups the opportunity to precisely target those compounds with the greatest relevance. With Latinos disproportionately exposed to air and water pollution,<sup>15</sup> it is urgent for our communities that Congress act to support this next frontier of medical research. Consequently, we urge Congress to take steps to fund exposomic and epigenetic research, with particular attention to exposomic disparate impacts.
- **Community Consultation in Development:** Research has shown that Latino communities—and Latinas in particular—are seldom consulted in decisions over the development of the built-environment, resulting in economic inefficiencies and concomitant health challenges.<sup>16</sup> In turn, studies demonstrate that development projects which obligate consultation with community leaders who are representative of affected populations result in faster, more effective development. In turn, Hispanic Federation exhorts the federal government to preferentially disburse funding to projects which include mandatory consultation with local leaders or unity councils.
- **Transit:** Latinos face environmental inequities in transit access which quickly exacerbate other environmental injustices. Access to reliable transportation is one of the most important tools in attaining reliable employment as well as life satisfaction; as such it is essential that the federal government act to address shortfalls in public transit.<sup>17</sup> So long as inequalities persist in Latino access to public transit, not only will they be deprived access to employment and urban amenities, but also will face worsened local environmental safety outcomes. To that end, Hispanic Federation advises Congress take measures to protect and expand public transit access, rooted in addressing obstacles to crime and safety, affordability, equal access, system legibility, and reliability.<sup>18</sup>

**OVER ONE-THIRD OF FARMWORKERS MAY BE FACING DELETERIOUS LEVELS OF TOXIC EXPOSURE STEMMING FROM THE WORKPLACE**

- System illegibility exacerbates distance between the Latino community and transit opportunities. In turn, such obstacles divide Latinos from transit systems, reducing ridership, and thereby justifying systemic choices not to serve the community in developing transit schema. Hispanic Federation demands that the federal government take steps to increase system legibility for all transit users.
- Likewise, transit costs can often be a striking barrier to use by Latinos. Largely fueled via flat rate fares, transit systems represent a financially regressive service to communities. Financial constraints reduce Latinos' access to personal vehicles, and in turn rendering our communities more dependent on public transportation.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Latino families are, on average, larger than non-Hispanic peers, further increasing the cost per trip.<sup>20</sup> Thus, transit fares are disproportionately expensive for the Latino community. In turn, affordability and reliability combine to severely proscribe freedom of movement in the Latino community, creating transit-enforced segregation. Hispanic Federation exhorts the federal government to take steps to subsidize use of public transit by lower-income populations to ensure that they do not become an economically inefficient poverty tax.
- **Freedom of Movement:** Freedom of movement is a recognized civil right under the fourteenth amendment, upheld by the Supreme Court under *Paul v Virginia and Saenz v Roe*. Unfortunately, a combination of hostile location registration policies, erosion of due-process norms, and geographic-economic redlining have conspired to undermine this right for Latinos. Consequently, our communities face sharper barriers to accepting jobs in different locations,<sup>21</sup> applying to colleges,<sup>22</sup> and even attending doctor's appointments.<sup>23</sup> Hispanic Federation urges Congress to adopt legislation reaffirming the constitutional right to freedom of movement by superseding state and local laws that impose unfair and unrealistic burdens to movement, and by overturning federal regulations which have had the same effect.
- **Disparate Impact Doctrine:** Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the disparate impact doctrine has been an essential component of civil rights law, anchored in the principle that a policy need not be facially or explicitly discriminatory in order to have discriminatory outcomes. In 1968, Congress extended similar protections to housing through the passage of Titles VIII and IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, better known as the Fair Housing Act. The ideals underpinning the disparate impact doctrine have been upheld through Supreme Court precedent,<sup>24</sup> and their ongoing salience is clear.<sup>25</sup> Hispanic Federation demands that the federal government take all appropriate steps to codify and strengthen the disparate impact standard to protect future generations from insidious forms of housing discrimination.

### Climate Change Mitigation

- **The Paris Agreement:** On January 20, 2025, the United States initiated steps to exit the Paris Climate Agreement.<sup>26</sup> The Paris Agreement has paved the way for meaningful reductions in carbon emissions.<sup>27</sup> In recent years, China's annual carbon emissions have blown past those of the United States, with India's rapidly on trajectory to surpass the U.S. as well. Participation in the Paris Climate Agreement therefore was not only a tool to combat climate change, but also a vital forum by which the United States may serve as a check on the potentially illegal industrial policies of emerging geopolitical rivals with the support of the broader international community.<sup>28</sup> By abandoning the Paris Agreement, the US unnecessarily sacrificed an avenue for geopolitical engagement, and consequently the Agreement should be reentered.
- **Energy transition:** Surveys confirm that Latinos support rapid and robust investment into clean, renewable energy.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, humanity must divest from polluting

**SURVEYS CONFIRM  
THAT LATINOS  
SUPPORT RAPID AND  
ROBUST INVESTMENT  
INTO CLEAN,  
RENEWABLE ENERGY**

and carbon-emitting fuel sources if we are to escape the worst of climate change's effects. This transition should approach energy from a full spectrum approach, combining wind power, solar energy, and net metering, and energy permitting reform.<sup>30</sup> Hispanic Federation and our partners have ardently fought for renewable energy in places like Orlando and Puerto Rico. These advances combine community buy-in with long-term economic gains, and Hispanic Federation implores Congress to make future investments along their contours.

- **Climate resilience:** In 2021, the EPA offered hope that many of the worst consequences of climate change can be prevented by investing in mitigation strategies, ranging from seawalls to fire-proofed buildings.<sup>31</sup> These measures would bring the added benefit of defraying some of the worsening insurance crises in states most impacted by climate change like Florida and California, and should be pursued as both proactive disaster prevention and economic investment.

### Disaster Relief

- **Disaster relief outreach, planning, and resiliency:** To counteract inequalities in disaster preparedness, Congress must equip state and local officials with sufficient resources to conduct linguistically and culturally effective outreach and coordination with Latino households and community leaders. Our work in Puerto Rico, Florida, North Carolina, California, and New York State confirms the urgency of these recommendations to ensure that our communities are not left behind.<sup>32</sup> These programs must include:

- Augmentation of short-term preparedness assistance like sandbags and fresh water
- Greater communication with Latino elected officials and community leaders who can serve as effective interlocutors for disaster preparations.
- Long-term investment in shelters and evacuation routes that are designed specifically to support majority-Latino neighborhoods.
- Equitable investment of recovery funds from bodies like FEMA and the Small Business Administration to support long-term recovery of Latino-owned businesses and homes.
- Drastic increases in disaster legal aid support for our community.<sup>33</sup>

**CONGRESS MUST EQUIP STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS WITH SUFFICIENT RESOURCES TO CONDUCT LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY EFFECTIVE OUTREACH AND COORDINATION WITH LATINO HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS**

- **Weather Service Access:** The National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration and the National Weather Service are essential in supporting community responses to catastrophic weather. During the 2024 hurricane season, NOAA's forecasting models were the best in the world, and individuals across all levels of the country relied on free access to their information to plan their responses. Despite the immense public utility these tools provide, there continue to be plans to privatize NOAA and the National Weather Service.<sup>34</sup> Hispanic Federation therefore demands the federal government reject any moves to privatize access to life-saving information.
- **Immigrants and Disaster Relief:** Immigrant workers are essential to short- and long-term disaster relief and recovery efforts in affected regions, but are ineligible for one of the key sources of federal aid. The vulnerable, essential workers who labor to rebuild others' houses and restore normalcy deserve federal assistance, yet it is precisely this population that is excluded from the Individual and Household program. Hispanic Federation exhorts the expansion of FEMA's Individual and Household program to DACA recipients and TPS designees, those on H-2A, H-2B, U- and Student Visas, as well as undocumented residents.

- Likewise, Hispanic Federation calls for expanded appropriations for USCIS and the State Department to address immigration-derived shortages in the labor supply to ensure that hard-hit communities have people ready to do the work that these communities need to ensure a prosperous recovery. Facilitating these applications would not only increase tax revenue but also free businesses employing them to fully participate in FEMA and SBA recovery programs.
- Additionally, we urge Congress to use its authority to increase the cap for H-2B visas with specific caveats that these additional visas be reserved for businesses working in regions devastated by natural disasters. Doing so will not only increase the available supply of workers in these areas, but also increase Congressional oversight of recovery-related labor in targeted areas.
- **Community Involvement Provisions:** Effective disaster relief is a complex process, and can only be reasonably accomplished with federal resources. However, those resources cannot be meaningfully deployed without consultation with local communities.<sup>35</sup> Hispanic Federation has led the way in encouraging and participating in community-involved disaster preparedness and recovery groups. Our work in these spaces aligns with research demonstrating that when you bring in community voices, disaster recovery is faster, cheaper, and more effective. Hispanic Federation calls upon Congress to codify requirements that disaster preparedness and relief oversight committees incorporate representatives from local communities to support disaster response efforts across the country.

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

### Local Environment

- Reports demonstrate that Latino children are particularly vulnerable to pollution exposure through PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution, as well as lead and pesticides, likely in response to their greater dependence on public green spaces for recreation.<sup>36</sup>
- There is growing evidence that the Latino community also faces elevated exposure to PFAS through contaminated water supply, notably through wastewater and military operations.<sup>37</sup>
- Hispanic Federation's work with Orlando OUC affirms the extent to which all cleanup efforts must be guided by community-engagement, led by those who are most attuned to the problems and opportunities in their own environments.
- On average, Latinos have less access to public transit that comes at a greater relative cost, and is less suited to their daily needs than their peers. This reality comes on top of an already absurd shortcoming in public transit infrastructure in the United States where "a typical job... is accessible by public transit within 90 minutes or less by only 27% of the surrounding workforce when considering the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the nation."<sup>38</sup> These challenges often stem from transit headway planning that deprioritizes marginalized communities, including Latinos.
- Empirical studies and surveys both have illustrated that, when transit generally aligns with their transportation needs, Latinos are inclined to do so at higher rates than their non-Hispanic peers.<sup>39</sup>
- The Latino community exhibits lower rates of automobile ownership than other demographics in the U.S., highlighting the need for better public transit to serve their needs. Simultaneously, some Latino individuals, particularly low-income immigrants, exhibit a strong preference for automobile use when transit is an option, suggesting that even when proximity to public transit exists, it is inadequate for their needs.<sup>40</sup>
- Not only does existing transit not tend to serve the interests and needs of Latino communities, but some studies have also shown a *decrease* in transit access for Latino neighborhoods over the past two decades.<sup>41</sup>
- Multiple studies concur with the salience of safety in aggravating Latino transit injustice.
  - In one survey, "everyone knew someone else who had been robbed or assaulted," while taking public transit, clarifying that there is a pervasive sense that Latino-serving transit—where it exists at all—is unsafe.<sup>42</sup>
  - Another survey noted that safety concerns do not always stem from unnamed robbers or muggers, but can come from police themselves, who discriminatorily question minority transit and cycle users, while one further suggested that some undocumented immigrants were deterred from establishing transit accounts from fears of their being used to build deportation cases against them, underscoring that, insofar as crime is a deterrent to equitable transit use, it must be addressed in ways that do not otherwise exacerbate longstanding tensions between the Latino and other minority communities and law enforcement.<sup>43</sup>
- Particularly in smaller metropolitan areas, transit instructions are often available only in English, rendering them of drastically limited utility for individuals who only speak other languages.<sup>44</sup>

**LATINO CHILDREN ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO POLLUTION EXPOSURE THROUGH PM<sub>2.5</sub> POLLUTION, AS WELL AS LEAD AND PESTICIDES**

- Even when multilingual printed information does exist, it's rare that transit operators speak any language other than English, such that, if any component of a trip goes awry or otherwise needs clarification, non-English speakers are once again left to their own devices.<sup>45</sup>
- Lack of outreach can render a system wholly inaccessible; in one case, an immigrant living in Burlington was entirely unaware of the existing public transportation network, and therefore had no ability to take advantage of it.<sup>46</sup>
- Among the Latino community, the relationship between wealth and mass transit dependence is exacerbated, as wealth is inversely coordinated with nativity or documentation, and many jurisdictions still do not permit undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, thereby further increasing dependence upon cash-fare public transit.<sup>47</sup>

### Climate Change Mitigation

- Perceptions of being outside the intended demographic for broader environmentalist movements leads to Latinos acting through informal networks, which can tend to limit their reach to powerbrokers. And when Latinos do engage in informal, communitarian climate and environmental activism, they are often dismissed as non-experts.<sup>48</sup>
- In 2021, the EPA produced a comprehensive report on expected consequences of climate change across the United States at the thresholds of 2°C and 4°C above the mean temperature from 1986-2005.<sup>49</sup> The report examined the likely consequences of climate change through the lenses of 1) increased childhood asthma risk, 2) increased temperature mortality, 3) labor hours lost due to extreme temperatures, 4) hours lost per annum to traffic due to coastal road flooding, 5) property loss due to coastal flooding, and 6) property loss due to inland flooding.<sup>50</sup>
  - Of these categories, Latinos were most vulnerable to lost labor hours, coastal flooding traffic delays, and coastal flooding property loss—relative to the general population.<sup>51</sup> Across each of these three categories, the Latino community is more vulnerable than any other racial-ethnic group in the United States with the exception of AAPI communities facing coastal flooding losses at the 4°C level.<sup>52</sup>
  - For instance, by 2035, the EPA estimates that Houston, TX, residents will lose an extra 154 hours per year to traffic delays from flooding. These elevated vulnerabilities stemmed from a combination of regional vulnerability (i.e. where Latinos live in the U.S.), their occupations, and the resources their communities possess to implement climate-facing adaptations on their own.
  - Thus, the Latino community is poised to suffer not simply extreme but *uniquely inequitable* consequences from medium-long term climate change.
- Latino households are disproportionately likely to reside in domiciles deemed inadequate housing by HUD according to data from the census bureau.<sup>53</sup> Lower quality housing increases risks from climate change.

**LATINO HOUSEHOLDS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LIKELY TO RESIDE IN DOMICILES DEEMED INADEQUATE HOUSING BY HUD ACCORDING TO DATA FROM THE CENSUS BUREAU**

## Disaster Relief

- Latino vulnerability to disasters is a consequence of where Latinos live in the United States. This problem is unlikely to naturally dissipate as these regions are those “where the Hispanic population is growing fastest.”<sup>54</sup>
- What targeted research out there that does exist indicates that the Latino community is more vulnerable to natural disasters than their neighbors, even when accounting for education and income.<sup>55</sup>
- Latino communities, especially noncitizens of any immigration status, have an almost 50% greater likelihood of living in inadequate housing than non-Hispanic Whites according to Census data. Such shelters are therefore more vulnerable to storm systems like Hurricanes Sandy, Helene and Milton, and are commensurately more susceptible to being rendered uninhabitable.
- Latinos are more likely to get news about disaster from resources like friends and family than from official government sources, risking the coherence and tone of official information as it wends its way through unofficial information networks.<sup>56</sup>

**THE LATINO COMMUNITY IS MORE VULNERABLE TO NATURAL DISASTERS THAN THEIR NEIGHBORS, EVEN WHEN ACCOUNTING FOR EDUCATION AND INCOME**

## CONCLUSION

There is a growing sense that environmental problems are messy and complicated; as such, their solutions demand entangled, innovative approaches. These problems are complex, and at times even seem intractable, as divergent interests clash over competing visions for the built and natural environment. Latinos are, and will continue to be, on the front lines of these battles. From hurricanes to headways, environmental challenges impose unconscionable medical and economic tolls on our communities. However, this exposure means that our communities have in turn developed the expertise required to lead on environmental issues.

Hispanic Federation has led the way in developing and empowering the environmental expertise of Latino communities. In turn, we understand not only what is at stake in this fight, but also how best it can be won. Proactive investments, restorative policies, and responsive relief efforts will all be required in the years to come, but they will reap rewards far in excess of their costs. By embracing the challenges of environmental justice in all its forms—and by listening to the communities most affected—the federal government has the ability to support a future in which all American communities benefit from clean air, connected spaces, and resilient infrastructure. It is imperative that this opportunity not be missed.

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- 25 One need not strain to conceive of conditions in which marketing in the current environment would constitute a key element of discrimination either in intent or in disparate impact. Indeed, look no further than the Fair Housing Act's prohibition of discrimination based on limited-English language proficiency as a proxy for national origin. An intentional choice to advertise exclusively within English language media markets within a region that contains many families that speak a language other than English within the home could represent a legitimate business decision based upon limited advertising resources, could comprise a disparate impact violation, or could be evidence of a discriminatory intent. See, for instance: <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-files-statement-interest-fair-housing-act-case-alleging-unlawful-exclusion> (Accessed 6/27/25), and <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/lepmemo091516.pdf> (Accessed 6/27/25.)
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# 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: Environmental Justice

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## 2026 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES:

# Housing

*“The real estate agencies, the promoters, they see homes and houses as places to invest money, to make money, while the people from the Latino community, they see the housing as a place of life, as a home.” – Anonymous Resident, Barrio Logan<sup>1</sup>*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing is a fundamental human necessity that so many can take for granted, yet serves as a source of uncertainty and precarity for so many more—including much of the Latino community. Decreased ownership rates, lower home values, tenure durations, and housing quality all take their tolls on housing stability in the Latino community, with sweeping ramifications. Housing (in)availability for Latinos contributes to lower levels of generational wealth, reduced access to health care and other amenities, decreased school system quality, increased exposure to pollution, increased vulnerability to natural disasters, and generally decreased quality of life and standard of living. While Americans across the board concur that housing has grown too expensive, and families of all stripes are feeling the pinch of rising housing costs, the Latino community is at the forefront of this battle, as the fastest growing demographic in the United States. More can and must be done to ensure that this most basic of rights to shelter is affordable and accessible to all Americans.

With these goals and challenges in mind, Hispanic Federation urges permitting reforms to increasing housing stock, including limitations on single-family zoning restrictions, a crackdown on speculation in rural housing, and a reinvestment in public housing, all of which would accelerate supply-side housing fixes while minimizing red-tape. Similarly, we encourage Congress to explore incentives for rentals that embrace tenant’s rights, and for construction firms that operate good faith apprentice and prevailing wage programs to better facilitate sustainable housing and construction. Hispanic Federation and our allies are heartened that housing is being approached on both sides of the aisle as the crisis it is, and we stand ready to offer our expertise and insights to help build an America where all people can access dignified housing.

**HOUSING (IN)AVAILABILITY FOR LATINOS CONTRIBUTES TO LOWER LEVELS OF GENERATIONAL WEALTH, REDUCED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND OTHER AMENITIES, DECREASED SCHOOL SYSTEM QUALITY, INCREASED EXPOSURE TO POLLUTION, INCREASED VULNERABILITY TO NATURAL DISASTERS, AND GENERALLY DECREASED QUALITY OF LIFE AND STANDARD OF LIVING**

## SITUATION REPORT

Housing access is a pressing problem for all Americans, but Latino communities in particular. In general, Latinos are less likely to own their homes than their peers, with the Latino homeownership rate roughly 15pp lower than the national average according to data from the St. Louis Fed.<sup>2</sup> These trends have persisted for decades.<sup>3</sup> Even against a backdrop of a universal crisis in housing affordability, Latinos have been harder hit than other groups. During the Great Recession, Latinos were affected by the highest rate of home foreclosure in the country, sending more Latino families away from homeownership to the pernicious rental market.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Latino households face greater rates of housing insecurity and cost burden than non-Hispanic White households, even when factoring in socioeconomic capacity and education.<sup>5</sup> Latinos are more likely to live in older, less-effectively maintained dwellings, that are themselves more likely to be termed legally “inadequate.” Simultaneously, Latino families are more likely to live in less desirable neighborhoods, and in buildings with more people living in the dwelling than the population at large.<sup>6</sup> Each of these concerns adds up to lower home values, increased health challenges, and decreased standard of living.

**LATINOS ARE MORE LIKELY TO LIVE IN OLDER, LESS-EFFECTIVELY MAINTAINED DWELLINGS, THAT ARE THEMSELVES MORE LIKELY TO BE TERMED LEGALLY “INADEQUATE”**

These concerns are only magnified in rural spaces. The housing crisis is hitting rural America with disheartening ferocity, as aging infrastructure combines with decreasing local jobs and an influx of home-based workers all taxing the capacity of rural municipalities.<sup>7</sup> Data assembled by rural housing coalitions present a worrying case: rural housing is more likely to be severely inadequate, plurally-occupied, and rent or mortgage burdened than suburban and urban counterparts.<sup>8</sup> These challenges emerge as Latinos step in to fill massive labor gaps in rural America, creating a uniquely rural component to Latino housing challenges.<sup>9</sup>

Such obstacles are in keeping with elevated poverty and decreased home occupancy durations among Latinos than their peers.<sup>10</sup> These inequities will only increase with rising housing costs. Reduced access to quality, affordable housing is troubling in its own right in terms of daily standard of living. Moreover, these housing shortfalls enable dire long-term ramifications. Poor domicile conditions contribute to worsened health outcomes, reduced disaster preparedness, and Latinos' general lack of financial capital.<sup>11</sup> As climate change and disasters further tax home maintenance infrastructure (and therefore pocketbooks), the fiscal and housing burden on the Latino community will only increase, perpetuating housing injustice, unless robust, proactive measures are implemented.

## ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Housing Access Reform

- **Low-income antidiscrimination:** Renters across the country routinely report having applications criminally rejected by landlords and rental agencies simply for using a federal program. These actions are not only discriminatory, but also increase the backlog of section 8 applications and decrease the efficiency of a vital housing choice program.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) must be empowered to vigorously enforce anti-discriminatory protections for those employing Section 8 vouchers. In turn, **Hispanic Federation urges Congress appropriate funding for HUD to expand the scope and frequency of its investigations into discriminatory housing violations, as well as increasing fines upon repeat violators.**
- **Non-discriminatory Housing Access:** The Fair Housing Act of 1968 as amended in 1988 (FHA) is a hard-won prize of the American civil rights movement, and has enjoyed repeated bipartisan investment in its terms as Americans of all political stripes have come to recognize that the prosperity of our nation as a whole depends on the nondiscriminatory housing of its people.<sup>13</sup> Since its passage, the Fair Housing Act has provided a blueprint by which the nation's housing stock could exit the rigors of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation in both South and North.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, recent regulatory actions have imperiled these protections at the very epicenter of housing access—publicly supported housing. **Hispanic Federation demands Congress take steps to reaffirm and codify nondiscriminatory housing, including safeguarding housing support for mixed-status households and upholding nondiscriminatory marketing—in keeping with the terms and legacy of the Fair Housing Act.**
- **Disparate Impact Doctrine:** The Fair Housing Act as drafted and amended has proven effective at eliminating the worst versions of housing segregation, but wider challenges from diffuse causes like redlining and disparate impacts remain.<sup>15</sup> Courts have routinely held that disparate impact protections are not only in-keeping with but necessary for upholding the statutes and intentions of the Fair Housing Act.<sup>16</sup> Recent research has evidenced that disparate impact violations, including marketing violations, continue to be reported to HUD and Fair Housing Assistance Programs (FHAPs) under FHA terms, and indeed, that these reports are becoming more important as obviously discriminatory housing practices have given way to more insidious approaches.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, **Hispanic Federation exhorts Congress enshrine fair housing protections from disparate impact within contracting and appropriations terms for housing and development funding and initiatives.**
- **FHA Loan Qualification Expansion:** FHA-backed loans are one of the most tested paths by which Americans may access the private housing market, and have proven their value again and again. However, access to FHA loans remains locked behind traditional assessment models like the FICO score. In recent years though, companies including FICO and Experian have enacted new programs like ExperianBoost and UltraFico that consider expanded factors including income and on-time bill payments into their scoring models. **Hispanic Federation advises Congress to provide pilot funding for a cohort study exploring FHA loan qualification based on scoring systems of those tools, to allow a wider range of lower-income Americans to enter the housing market.**

**THESE ACTIONS ARE NOT ONLY DISCRIMINATORY, BUT ALSO INCREASE THE BACKLOG OF SECTION 8 APPLICATIONS AND DECREASE THE EFFICIENCY OF A VITAL HOUSING CHOICE PROGRAM**

- **Preserve Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac:** Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have proven remarkably effective at ensuring a long-term stable housing market, particularly in the aftermath of expanded guardrails following the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, these bodies have proven largely successful at their goal of rendering home loans more accessible to lower-income American families without jeopardizing American home values or the market writ-large. Consequently, there is little reason to interfere with their ongoing mission. For example, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have traditionally had some or all of their profit margins taxed in keeping with their quasi-public nature. While there is a growing movement to end those special taxes, we instead encourage the maintenance of those taxes with the proceeds from partial-profits instead funneled to housing development projects. In sum, **Hispanic Federation demands Congress reject bids to private Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and instead bolster their ability to pursue their statutory mandates for generations to come.**
- **Transit-Oriented Development:** There exists a robust literature suggesting that not only are Latinos ready and willing to take public transit when it meets their needs, but also that the community has an interest in and a preference for transit-oriented development (TOD). Broadly speaking, TOD refers to neighborhood (re)development to emphasize density, proximity to (ideally multiple) transit lines, mixed-use zoning between commercial and residential spaces, and particularly efforts to combine commercial and transit spaces to create community hubs. By moving people and businesses closer to transit and vice-versa, TOD can accomplish many crucial environmental-transit goals, including reducing cost and increasing reliability by decreasing number of trips required, decreasing crime by raising the amount of activity around transit stops, and increasing amenities at stations themselves.<sup>19</sup> While not a silver bullet for community challenges, TOD on the whole increases access to affordable housing, boosts local businesses, improves tax bases thereby increasing funding to local schools, and increases availability of medical and education services.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, **Hispanic Federation advises Congress provide funding initiatives and regulatory cover to support expansion of transit-oriented development.**
- **Zoning Reform:** Zoning reform will play a vital role in tackling the housing availability and affordability crisis, and offers a unique opportunity for bipartisan creativity in a sticky policy area. Through a combination of development incentives and deregulation, it may be possible to augment home construction in most areas of the U.S. A national reduction of single-family, Euclidian zoning policies may therefore yield considerable benefits.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, **Hispanic Federation implores Congress to provide pilot funding for jurisdictions exploring alternative zoning approaches and to reject legislation preempting such state and local policies.**

## Housing Stock Investments

- **Public Housing:** Latino households are disproportionately reliant upon the public housing system.<sup>22</sup> Insufficient support for public housing hurts Latino renters: reducing generational wealth, quality of life, and sharply proscribing lifelong opportunities. **Hispanic Federation is active in connecting families with public and affordable housing support across the country, informing the following proposals:**
  - Programmatic expansion of the HOME Investment Partnerships Program,<sup>23</sup> to both increase the supply and the quality of the country's affordable housing, particularly by addressing funding gaps in preexisting development contracts and proposals to clear the public housing construction backlog.

**PUBLIC HOUSING HURTS  
LATINO RENTERS: REDUCING  
GENERATIONAL WEALTH,  
QUALITY OF LIFE, AND  
SHARPLY PROSCRIBING  
LIFELONG OPPORTUNITIES**

- Similarly, expand funding for the Public Housing Capital program to support extant authorities to make urgently needed repairs and other modernization investments that have been defrayed by the ongoing public housing capital deficit.
- Likewise, increasing the programmatic scope for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers will enable a greater array of housing to qualify under its terms, reducing waitlists while expanding its protections over a larger geographic range, and therefore population.
- **Construction Incentives:** Ongoing housing shortages are leading to a growing rent burden in the United States that can only be truly resolved by increasing housing supply and therefore competition.<sup>24</sup> In support of supply-side approaches to the housing crisis, we encourage Congress to explore implementing a tax relief program for construction and development firms that comply with apprenticeship and prevailing wage program, with additional tax incentives for newly constructed starter homes and for those whose constructions go to first time homebuyers. Doing so will not only decrease the costs of construction in the face of expanding federal, state, and local regulations, but also help safeguard American construction against generational loss of expertise. As such, **Hispanic Federation calls for a generational investment in targeted home construction to ensure the American Dream can become a reality for millions to whom it is currently denied.**
- **Housing Program Funding:** The United States already plays host to a variety of programs intended to augment access to affordable, stable housing, including Public Housing Agencies, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, the National Housing Trust, and Section 8 voucher programs. These initiatives support individuals in affording housing, states and municipalities in constructing new low-income housing, and property managers in conducting essential maintenance. However, for too long they have gone underfunded and under-supported, resulting in massive backlogs for applications and an increase in inadequate housing.<sup>25</sup> These funding shortfalls only exacerbate housing challenges for low-income Latinos, who face disproportionately lower access to housing programs relative to income.<sup>26</sup> **Hispanic Federation implores Congress appropriate a considerable increase in funding for affordable housing programs like those mentioned above.**
- **Commercial to Residential Conversions:** A growing array of developers and policymakers has recognized that unused or underutilized commercial real estate offer a prime opportunity to expand America's housing stock through commercial-to-residential conversions.<sup>27</sup> The Congressional Research Service has noted that these conversions offer relative advantages over new constructions in many circumstances, including navigating land use restrictions and economic support to downtown and main street areas.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, under current policy, these conversions are often restrictive, can be costly, and tend to prioritize luxury markets at the expense of affordable housing.<sup>29</sup> As such, **Hispanic Federation calls for Congress to provide incentives to support such conversions so long as they reserve a portion of their properties for low-income housing, and for the federal government to offer nationwide conversion guidelines to streamline development planning.**
- **Multi-Generational Housing Policies:** Amid rising housing and health care costs, a growing number of Americans are embracing multigenerational living. Latinos are almost 50 percent more likely than other groups to adopt these arrangements, which contribute to increased strength of familial connections<sup>30</sup> and can boost health outcomes among participants.<sup>31</sup> However, the U.S. housing stock is largely not designed to facilitate multigenerational living,<sup>32</sup> which can lead to exacerbated maintenance requirements and infrastructural challenges. Everything from insurance to disaster relief can be complicated by multigenerational living arrangements, raising questions about both civil rights protections based on family status and unnecessary restrictions on the housing stock. **Hispanic Federation urges Congress to modernize federal housing, disaster relief, and tax codes to support the growing proportion of Americans adopting multigenerational living.**

## Protections

- **Good Cause Eviction Laws:** With the rapid, nationwide increase in rents has come a steady, national increase in rental evictions.<sup>33</sup> Amid this growing crisis, state and local policymakers have embraced novel approaches like legislation restricting eviction solely to tenants who have failed to pay rent, violated “a substantial obligation of their tenancy,” obstructing repairs, or use the rental for illegal activities, inter alia.<sup>34</sup> Such measures have ranged from mandatory eviction notice and action periods to broader procedural and intent requirements. Such measures have successfully reduced evictions, thereby supporting familial stability and local economies without tendering tenant protections outside mainstream American sentiment.<sup>35</sup> In the face of widening eviction proceedings, **Hispanic Federation supports a nationwide implementation of proposals modeled on New York’s Good Cause Eviction Law.**
- **Disaster relief for renters:** Research led by Georgia Tech has shown that not only are renters less likely to receive timely assistance after a natural disaster, rents also tend to rise swiftly in the years following disasters, in some cases by double digits.<sup>36</sup> In keeping with this analysis, **we call for the steady expansion of Community Development Block Grants–Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) nationwide, as these targeted funds have been shown to sharply proscribe rent increases in the wake of natural disasters, and the expansion of disaster relief programs to both renters and homeowners.**
- **Climatic Rental Protections:** The EPA predicts that over the next decade, the number of Latino households living in areas regularly exposed to dangerous heat days is set to increase by 25%-43%. Access to stable climate control tools like air conditioning will only become that much more vital under such conditions. However, growing numbers of Latinos have been forced into housing that meets HUD defines as inadequate, only amplifying heat- and weather-related exposure.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, tenant rights to climate control tools are governed by a patchwork of state and local regulations, and enforcement is minimal, with considerable burden on individual renters.<sup>38</sup> With low-income Latino renters across the country facing perilous temperatures not only outdoors but in their own homes, **Hispanic Federation calls for a national blueprint on enforceable temperature and humidity protections for renters nationwide to ensure not only safety but simplicity of regulations for both tenants and landlords.**
- **LIHEAP and energy efficiency improvements:** Since its establishment in 1981, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), has served as a crucial lifeline for vulnerable households facing unaffordable energy rates, particularly heating costs.<sup>39</sup> By offering both a structured block grant and emergency funding, the program provides a balance between flexibility and foreseeable appropriations.<sup>40</sup> However, LIHEAP is structurally designed to support heating costs more than cooling costs, even as growing regions of the country are exposed to dangerous heat waves.<sup>41</sup> Latinos are already subjected to 20 percent higher median energy burden than non-Hispanic White Households.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, **Hispanic Federation calls for reauthorization of LIHEAP that not only expands appropriations but also does so by bolstering support for cooling in addition to heating.**

**RENTERS (ARE) LESS LIKELY TO RECEIVE TIMELY ASSISTANCE AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER**

## DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

- Hispanic Federation and our partners have been hard at work to connect unhoused people in our community and others in need with requisite resources, and to ensure that authorities providing those services have the knowledge to do so effectively. For instance, HF programs have supported the repair, reconstruction, and revitalization of thousands of homes in areas ranging from Williamsburg, New York to Puerto Rico.<sup>43</sup>
- Across the United States, rates of housing cost burden (defined as a household spending 30% or more of monthly income on housing costs) are high, and on the rise.<sup>44</sup>
- Data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development show that just over one-quarter of households in public housing are Latino-led.<sup>45</sup>
  - Meanwhile, 18.4 percent are on Housing Choice Vouchers also known as Section 8 housing, with 16.4 percent on multifamily living assistance.
  - All three of these rates far exceed the eligible Latino population, and rates for Section 8 support would likely be higher were the voucher waitlist shorter than the presently egregious 28 months.<sup>46</sup>
  - These concerns are only likely to worsen as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) predicts a widening gap between public housing need and availability.<sup>47</sup>
- Over the past several years, nominal housing prices have risen more than 30 percent.<sup>48</sup> During this same period, average hourly earnings rose some 22.5 percent. Thus, even as overall wages have tracked even with or slightly outpaced inflation, housing price inflation has drastically outstripped wage growth.<sup>49</sup>
- Despite assertions that Fair Housing Act violations are on the decline, quantitative research demonstrates that not only cases but also judgments in favor of plaintiffs have held relatively steady throughout the life of the Act, with some fluctuation according to national circumstances and occasional amendments to the Act and its enforcement mechanisms.<sup>50</sup>
  - Indeed, look no further than the Fair Housing Act's prohibition of discrimination based on limited-English language proficiency as a proxy for national origin.<sup>51</sup> An intentional choice to advertise exclusively within English language media markets within a region that contains many families that speak a language other than English within the home<sup>52</sup> could represent a legitimate business decision based upon limited advertising resources, could comprise a disparate impact violation, or could be evidence of a discriminatory intent, speaking to the ongoing necessity of the Act and its enforcement.
- The National Association of Home Builders notes that zoning reforms to permit construction of so-called "missing middle housing" like townhouses, duplexes, and split-levels in Minneapolis led to a 45 percent increase in permits issued for new housing construction, while similar incentives in Salt Lake City led to commensurate benefits.<sup>53</sup>
  - In more taxed areas like California, regulations that functionally ended single family zoning in those areas most distressed by the housing crisis should be reinforced through national legislation or regulations codifying the legality of those experiments.<sup>54</sup>
- Recent, real-world experiments in rezoning, including targeted and wholesale 'upzoning' have confirmed that regulatory changes can produce real returns on housing stock on appreciable time scales. Both Philadelphia and New York City have implemented new policies aimed at increasing the scale of new construction, or upzoning, with both cities reaping the benefits of

**JUST OVER ONE-QUARTER  
OF HOUSEHOLDS IN PUBLIC  
HOUSING ARE LATINO-LED**

increased home production. Targeted upzoning in New York City proved particularly effective, yielding over 4,000 additional units of housing over a four year period.<sup>55</sup>

- Rates of homelessness and rent-burden are directly correlated with decreased economic activity,<sup>56</sup> lowered educational attainment,<sup>57</sup> public health outcomes,<sup>58</sup> and increased rates of intimate partner violence,<sup>59</sup> across entire communities.<sup>60</sup>
- Threat of eviction rose rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic, with Latino and Black households facing particularly acute threats.<sup>61</sup>
  - Policy responses to these challenges lead to an array of protective measures, including the 2021 IFR and the 2024 Final Rule, which accorded renters in HUD-supported housing a thirty day warning window in which to avert eviction via arrears of rent payments.<sup>62</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Housing access has increasingly dominated discussions in Congress, state legislatures, and kitchen tables across the country. Families are struggling with rising rents, climbing maintenance costs, and down payments that appear steadily more out of reach. Latino communities lay at the center of these conversations. Our adult children struggle to find affordable places to live on their own; our entrepreneurs rely on equity to support growing businesses; and we continue to be disproportionately represented in many of the industries most essential to growing and maintaining America's housing stock. Nonetheless, Latino voices have gone unheeded in these essential policy discussions.

America stands at the ready to redress these housing challenges. Workers are eager to earn their wages sheltering vulnerable families. Developers are poised to invest in expanding resilient, durable homes, and policymakers have every incentive to deliver solutions. As such, America's housing challenges are primarily issues of political agreement and commitment. We at Hispanic Federation believe that housing accord and action may best be found by consulting the community most entailed in all aspects of housing, from consultation to closing—our own. By leaning into affirmative nondiscrimination, providing new paths to financing and construction, and offering relevant resources and incentives, the federal government can support a generational expansion of our nation's housing supply. Doing so would transform our economic and social landscape for the better, and usher in an urgent revitalization of the American Dream.

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Hotline: (844) HF-AYUDA (844.432.9832), (866) HF-AYUDA (866.432.9832)

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