

April 1, 2020

## **Latino Policy Forum recommendations for the inclusion of Latino communities in government and philanthropic COVID-19 relief efforts**

*If just 16% of Latinos are able to work from home, that means that the vast majority of Latino workers are either being forced to risk their health and keep working through the crisis or have lost their income or their job. –Rep. Joaquin Castro, Chairman of Congressional Hispanic Caucus*

### **BACKGROUND**

The Latino community is vital to the social, political, and economic vitality of Illinois but is especially vulnerable to the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many data points outline this:

- 60% of Latino workers earn under \$15 per hour (highest among all racial/ethnic groups).
- 16% of Latinos in Illinois have no health insurance and are uninsured (highest among all racial/ethnic groups).
- 16% of Latinos have capacity to work from home (lowest among all racial/ethnic groups), compared to 30% of US workforce.
- Latinos, on average, have lower access to public benefits.
- Latino children from low-income families have lower participation in cash welfare and food stamp programs.
- Latino children from low-income families have lower rates of Medicaid enrollment.

The fear in the Latino community surrounding the current federal immigration climate compounds this vulnerability. In the Forum's public-charge workshops, we hear stories of Latinos, including those who are native-born Americans, dropping government benefits for which they and their families are eligible. We hear stories of families unsure of how they will survive this crisis, in serious need of:

- Mental health services, especially for those in the restaurant, hospitality, and service industries who are facing loss of income or job loss
- Necessities such as food, medication, baby formula, and diapers
- Money to pay rent and/or mortgages
- Outreach to suburbs and other areas with fewer community-based organizations

According to a March 24, 2020, story in *The Hill*, **Latinos will bear the economic brunt of the current pandemic.** *The Hill* reports that:

- 83% of Latinos see COVID-19 as a threat to their personal finances.
  - About two-thirds of employed adult Latinos say they would not get paid if the coronavirus caused them to miss work for more than two weeks.
  - About half of Latinos say it would be difficult to pay bills if they had to miss work.

### **Equitable investment in Latino communities**

All low-income communities need equitable investment during this crisis. This need is especially acute within the Latino community. Funding to Latino-based organizations from the Illinois Department of Human Services has decreased by 47% (\$15 million) over the past 10 years.

We recognize that a commitment to equity investment requires striking a balance between funding larger-serving organizations, such as the Greater Chicago Food Depository, and smaller organizations with stronger trust and access in their communities. However, in order to reach Latinos directly, it's imperative that dollars are directed to Latino-serving organizations.

**A conservative baseline benchmark for equity would mirror the Latino population of 17% in Illinois and 25% for the Chicago region.** This conservative estimate reflects the proportion of Latinos within the total population, not their proportion within the low-income population.

### **Latino Policy Forum efforts**

The Latino Policy Forum will continue to assist with the crisis and offers our support to government and philanthropic leaders. The Forum will:

- Maintain an [updated page of COVID-19 resources](#) in English and Spanish
- Convene a network of approximately 250 community-based organization leaders regularly to provide updates on resources and information as the crisis unfolds
- Advocate with philanthropic leaders behind the Illinois and Chicago regional emergency funds to ensure equitable allocations to organizations serving the Latino community
- Determine how to ensure that essential services, especially food, are disbursed to Latino and immigrant communities
- Monitor, analyze, and share information on the federal stimulus packages as they impact the Latino community
- Continue advocating for the inclusion of all Latino children and families, particularly those that are undocumented, in all available relief efforts

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **General**

- Ensure that lifeline agencies serving the Latino community receive the necessary support to continue their work on the front lines.
  - Many of these organizations might not be on the radar of traditional philanthropy.
  - Many of these organizations, especially hometown associations, need technical assistance to apply for emergency funds and understand the breadth of resources available to them.
  - As most Latinos in Illinois now live outside of Chicago, efforts should be targeted to the suburbs and the rest of the state, where there are few such organizations.
  - Organizations need staffing assistance to be able to adequately serve their participants as the crisis continues.

- Be flexible in the disbursement of funds to social-service providers, businesses, and families.
  - Undocumented Latinos, who will not be eligible for most resources emerging from the federal stimulus packages, are in serious need of resources.
- Ensure that all resources are available in English and Spanish.
  - Establishing and advertising bilingual hotlines would allow any Illinois resident to easily call and learn more about how to access services.
- Expand the reach of food organizations to serve communities outside of their normal range.
  - The Forum has had preliminary conversations with the Greater Chicago Food Depository on ways to reach these areas, such as mobile food pantries.
- In addition to the stateside and Chicago-region COVID-19 emergency funds, other entities that establish emergency funds, such as local governments and school districts, should provide resources to all residents, regardless of immigration status.

### **Education**

- Encourage school districts to provide clear guidelines, in English and Spanish, on meeting coursework deadlines during the period of shelter-in-place and school closures.
- Provide bilingual information on changes related to testing, including AP tests, ACT, and SAT, as well as how fees associated with these tests can be waived.
- Inform parents, in English and Spanish, how to access free online tutoring for their children.
- Provide bilingual, culturally sensitive help to families enrolling in early childhood services.
- Facilitate access in Latino communities to INCCRRA or local CCR&R agencies for trusted referrals and information.
- Mitigate the digital divide in order to ensure the most equitable access to e-learning.
  - ISBE must provide bilingual guidance specific to e-learning, with consideration for English Learners, special education students, and early childhood education.
- IDHS and ISBE should work collaboratively to award funding to early-learning programs at the inception of programming, as opposed to a reimbursement process.
  - Latino-heavy areas are more likely to suffer from funding inadequacy and disruption.

### **Housing**

- Provide small landlords and individuals holding subprime loans with mortgage relief, ideally with loan end-dates extending for the time period of the crisis.
- Enforce moratoriums on all evictions, foreclosures, and tax sales, and prohibit landlords from issuing late fees. Penalize landlords who ignore these rules.
- Develop a plan to avoid a rush of evictions, foreclosures, and/or utility shut-offs when the shelter-in-place order is lifted. Include a payback plan for those who have experienced economic hardship due to COVID-19.
- Since most Latinos in Illinois live outside of the City of Chicago, the state should advise and assist local townships and municipalities with:
  - Establishing efficient procedures to provide housing for all, regardless of immigration status
  - Ensuring that all forms and information, online and on paper, are available in Spanish. Consideration of materials on paper is important due to the digital divide.

### **Immigration**

- Identify State tax filers who have filed with an ITIN and provide an emergency infusion of cash to the household.
- Increase funding for Illinois Welcoming Centers. These centers provide culturally sensitive assistance to ensure that immigrants can access state programs providing essential services including healthcare, childcare, and unemployment assistance.
- Provide cash assistance to immigrants, especially the undocumented, so they can access essentials such as food, medicine, and housing.
- Insist on the release of ICE detainees to reduce COVID-19 fatalities among the incarcerated.

### **Employment and Worker Protection**

- Establish a pool for undocumented workers to receive unemployment compensation.
  - New Jersey has established a \$10-million fund for the undocumented.
- Ensure that the Department of Labor immediately responds to reports of unsafe working conditions. The Forum has heard of numerous cases of employees working without adequate protection and without proper social distancing.
  - Encourage employees to report unsafe working conditions to the Attorney General's Workplace Rights Bureau at (844) 740-5076 or submit a complaint online.
  - Create a "workforce task force" to investigate abuse in the workplace.
  - Reach out to the Raise the Floor Alliance to get examples of workplace abuses and to receive policy and enforcement recommendations.
- Generate relief grants for small businesses, as many have limited capacity to pay back loans.
- Provide bilingual, step-by-step support by phone or video to small-business owners who need help completing loan or financial-assistance applications.
- Enable businesses and entrepreneurs who file with ITIN numbers to receive economic relief.
- Provide resources to street vendors and the chambers of commerce who work with them.

### **Health and Nutrition**

- Provide PPE to front-line health providers and staff in community-based organizations that are providing emergency direct services.
- Provide technical assistance and guidance to school districts to help them distribute meals. Develop systems like that of Chicago Public Schools.
- Work with grocery delivery services to waive fees in low-income zip codes.
- Work with stores that require subscriptions or memberships, such as Costco, to allow non-members from low-income zip codes to shop while the shelter-in-place order is active.
- IDHS should develop an eligibility and outreach plan, in English and Spanish, to ensure those who are not currently receiving SNAP benefits have access to them.
  - Currently, families living at or below 165% of poverty are SNAP eligible.
  - The new emergency guideline for eligibility is at or below 185% of poverty for children who would have otherwise received meals at schools.

For further information, please contact Sylvia Puente at [spuente@latinopolicyforum.org](mailto:spuente@latinopolicyforum.org) or Roberto Valdez at [rvaldezjr@latinopolicyforum.org](mailto:rvaldezjr@latinopolicyforum.org).