

February 22, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

On behalf of UnidosUS, I write to urge you to propose a FY2023 budget that reduces racial disparities and advances equity for Latinos<sup>1</sup> and their families.

UnidosUS, previously known as the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization which has built a stronger country by creating opportunities for Latinos for more than 50 years. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the U.S. and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers at the national and local levels.

While our **recent report** shows encouraging progress, Latino communities need long-term investments to truly build back better. Those include accessible, affordable health coverage; steps to close the racial wealth and achievement gaps; and measures to make existing government programs more accessible. This must include the undocumented and families of mixed immigration status, who have helped carry our nation through the pandemic, and on whom we continue to rely to fill labor shortages in essential industries.

We urge you to deliver on your commitments to advance racial equity with your FY2023 budget proposal. It is time for Congress to deliver for our country's 62 million Latinos, who for too long been disproportionately excluded from federal priorities.

**Invest in health coverage and nutrition initiatives.** We cannot be a healthy nation if Latinos are left behind. Today, **almost one in four** Latinos still do not have health insurance—despite their concentration in jobs that simultaneously increase their risk of COVID-19 and offer poor health benefits. Meanwhile, the Census Bureau recently found that nearly **one in five** Latinos is food insecure. Through the following investments, the federal government can deliver the health and nutritional support that Latinos need.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

- **\$415 million for Consumer Assistance Programs.** Consumer Assistance Programs provide statewide grants that help consumers enroll in health coverage, or mitigate problems with existing insurance. Since the pandemic has disrupted coverage and increased existing confusion surrounding policy changes after the Affordable Care Act, we must make consumer assistance available to those who need it—especially Latinos who are **more likely** than non-Hispanic whites to seek it.
- **\$77 million for the CDC’s Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Program.** The REACH Program addresses racial and ethnic health disparities through community-based participation with state and local health departments, tribes, universities, and community-based organizations. The REACH Program has succeeded in reducing obesity, **improving** hypertension management, and **addressing** disparities in HIV among Latinos. Increased funding would support another 18 REACH programs nationwide, including in states like Florida and Arizona which have large Latino populations but only one funding recipient each.
- **\$15 million for ACA Navigator grants.** Navigators provide the free enrollment assistance that has proven essential to increasing health insurance participation. **Research shows** that more than one in four consumers sought help when attempting to enroll or re-enroll in ACA or Medicaid coverage in 2020. Latinos are significantly more likely than other groups to seek out and use enrollment assistance. Navigators help to demystify an ever-changing health coverage landscape. They make applying for and using health insurance simpler, especially for immigrants and mixed-status families, as well as individuals who have limited English proficiency.
- **\$5 million for SNAP Competitive Outreach Grants.** These grants **help** community and faith-based organizations conduct effective outreach to underserved populations, including by engaging Latino media outlets through bilingual and bicultural outreach specialists. Food insecurity has risen dramatically as a result of the pandemic, with Hispanic households far **more likely** to be food insecure than the national average. Our recent poll **found** that 44 percent of Latino parents relied upon food assistance, including SNAP, during the pandemic—and a **similar number** cut back spending on food. This funding would increase SNAP enrollment of eligible low-income Latinos, mixed-status families, and other underserved populations.

**Support the economic empowerment and housing needs of Latinos.** Deficient funding and denial of access to the social safety net for Hispanics have led to a significant wealth gap. Today, the typical white family has **five times** the wealth of the typical Hispanic family. For over 25 years, the share of Latinos who own a home—the most powerful tool to build wealth and break cycles of poverty—has registered about **25 to 30 percentage points** lower than that of white Americans. Latino workers are overconcentrated in jobs with low wages, poor health and retirement benefits, and high volatility. To reduce the wealth gap, we urge you to include:

- **\$500 million for the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund.** This fund promotes access to capital and local economic growth in urban and rural low-income communities across the nation. As private organizations focused primarily on developing communities, CDFIs play a critical role in reaching marginalized groups and ensuring access to financial resources. Their role is especially important for Latinos, who—despite being the fastest-growing segment of business owners—continue to face obstacles to accessing capital.
- **\$7 billion for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Operations Support Program.** This funding would help reduce major backlogs in processing tax returns and issuing taxpayer refunds, which harm families and individuals struggling during the pandemic. It would streamline the application process for Individual Tax Identification Numbers, which suffers from substantial delays and outdated paperwork requirements. The IRS should use these funds to develop data-sharing arrangements and develop proxy datasets that can measure and predict the impacts of tax credits, including the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit, on the general population and for minorities.
- **\$3.5 billion for the IRS Taxpayer Assistance Program.** This funding ensures that working families can access critical tax credit programs like the Child Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and several others. It would also support low-income communities through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program; the Certified Accepted Agents who assist with applications for ITINs; address systemic barriers faced by low-income communities when accessing the tax system; and allow the IRS to protect taxpayers against fraud through culturally competent education and outreach.
- **\$100 million for HUD’s Housing Counseling Program.** The Housing Counseling Program allows community-based organizations to provide personal financial advice that keeps renters and homeowners in their homes. Robust funding is critical, given that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the housing market. Today, about **750,000 households** remain in COVID-19 related forbearance plans and nearly **950,000 borrowers** are in serious delinquency status. As UnidosUS has **documented**, borrowers who receive housing counseling in the early stages of default are far more likely to receive a loan modification and stay in their homes than those who receive counseling when they are seriously delinquent or in foreclosure.
- **\$10 billion for First-Generation Down Payment Assistance.** Housing equity accounts for **over 57 percent** of Latino household wealth. Latinos are the only community that is **expected to see an increase** in homeownership between 2020 and 2040. A strong investment in housing for first-generation homebuyers would help close the wealth gap for Latinos and others for whom saving for a down payment is a **formidable hurdle** to buying a home.

- **\$20 billion for the Homeowner Assistance Fund.** Federal loss mitigation policies have helped many homeowners keep their homes and wealth during the pandemic. But delayed rollouts and inequitable implementation has left homeowners experiencing financial stress and placed them at risk of losing their home. This is particularly true of low-income homeowners, homeowners of color, and those who are behind on their mortgages and other housing-related expenses.
- **\$70.3 million for HUD’s Fair Housing Initiatives Program.** This program, which assists victims of housing discrimination, is especially important for Latinos. Hispanic renters, for example, are **less likely** to get a response from property managers when seeking a rental home. At the same time, Latino homeowners are **more likely** to pay a higher interest rate for their mortgage and pay greater refinance fees compared to white borrowers. Programs like this ensure that Latinos are treated fairly when seeking to rent or purchase a home.

**Strengthen the educational pipeline for Latino students.** Within the next decade, one in three students in the United States will be Latino. Even though Latino children are the largest and youngest group of color, they face unique obstacles to a quality education. School closures during the pandemic have disrupted learning for millions of Latino students, from early childhood through college.

- **\$32.1 billion for Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start, and Head Start programs.** By 2060, an estimated one-third of three- and four-year-olds in the U.S. will be Latino. More than four million children enrolled in preschool programs in the United States are dual-language learners, and more than 75% of Latino children over the age of five enter U.S. schools speaking Spanish. Robust funding of these early childhood programs would allow more children to enroll in these critical early education programs, which would set them up for success in school.
- **\$2 billion for Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** Federal funding for English language acquisition instruction has not kept pace with the ever-growing population of nearly five million English Learner (EL) students. Schools use Title III grants to supplement their programs designed to help ELs—10 percent of total students—attain English proficiency, meet high academic standards, and better integrate English learners into the school system.
- **Double the maximum federal Pell Grant.** Pell Grants are among the most effective tools empowering low-income students to attend college and achieve financial success. The maximum Pell Grant for which a student should be eligible during award year 2022–2023 should be \$12,990. Doubling the Pell Grant would restore purchasing power to half the cost of college for a bachelor’s degree at an in-state, public institution.

- **\$1.3 billion for federal TRIO programs.** Federal TRIO programs include five discretionary grants that provide tutoring, rigorous coursework, and guidance to first-generation, low-income college students. This is especially important for Latino students who often lack the resources that would prepare them to attend and earn a degree. TRIO programs serve more than 800,000 students annually, and 19 percent of TRIO program participants are Latino.
- **\$408 million for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).** GEAR UP helps disadvantaged students in high-poverty middle and high schools prepare for, enroll in, and complete college. Through state grants and partnerships, the program provides valuable services that also provide students with professional development and an understanding of the necessary costs to attend an institution of higher learning. The program serves nearly 700,000 students annually and over one-third of participants are Latino.
- **\$66 million for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP).** HEP and CAMP assist migrant and farmworker students obtain a GED and complete their first academic year in a postsecondary institution. This gives students greater access to jobs and advanced workplace training. Every year, these programs provide 8,000 students the academic, financial, and personal support to enter the workforce or pursue a postsecondary education.
- **\$350 million for the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) Program (Title V of the Higher Education Act).** The DHSI program helps Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) expand educational opportunities for Hispanic students. Today, over 1.9 million Hispanic students are enrolled at these institutions, and there are over 400 located in 24 states and Puerto Rico. By supporting the construction and renovation of HSIs, faculty development, teacher education, and providing other services, strong funding for DHSI would help enhance academic offerings, program quality, and the stability of these important institutions.
- **\$132 million for Teacher Quality Partnership Grants.** This funding would help forge a pathway for prospective teachers of color to obtain teaching credentials and improve their professional development. These pathways would boost underrepresented populations in the education workforce, including through Grow Your Own programs that focus on developing and retaining educators from the local community.
- **\$1 billion for Retention and Completion Fund.** Supporting students' persistence and completion is critical to expanding access and affordability to higher education. Congress must ensure that colleges have adequate resources to provide evidence-based academic and culturally relevant services. Increases in direct support, career coaching, and networking opportunities serve Latinos, first-generation college students and students impacted by poverty.

**Advance equity, inclusion, and civil rights.** Structural racism and inequitable federal investments have contributed to lagging economic, education, housing, and health outcomes among Latinos. Unfortunately, political polarization and misinformation further undermine the civil and human rights of Latinos and other historically marginalized communities. We urge you to advance a budget that roots out discrimination within our federal agencies.

- **Fully fund the defense of civil rights across federal agencies.** Expanding the scope, staff and financial resources of civil rights offices will help swiftly resolve cases of discrimination. Specifically, funding the creation of an office of civil rights within the Federal Trade Commission would protect the civil rights and privacy of consumers in traditional and digital markets.
- **Increase funding for federal agencies to promote voter participation in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and the March 2021 Executive Order on Promoting Access to Voting.** Agency-specific activities, such as those included in the [Fact Sheet](#) “Biden Administration Promotes Voter Participation with New Agency Steps,” should be maintained in off-cycle years to maximize voter engagement and registration.
- **Require the regular collection of disaggregated racial/ethnic data across state and local agencies from recipients of law enforcement grants.** Time and again, we have witnessed abuses committed by law enforcement officials against people of color. We encourage funding for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistant Grant (JAG) program, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants, and other efforts to collect, report, and publish disaggregated data. We firmly believe that transparency and accountability create better relationships between law enforcement officials and the communities they serve.
- **Establish and fund an Advisory Commission.** Compared to their white peers, Latinos are more likely to be denied bail or face higher bonds and are more likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities. This Commission would examine the role of institutionalized racism in justice systems, as well as reform policies and practices that have historically kept Latinos justice-involved.
- **Restrict the militarization of police and strengthen law enforcement oversight.** While Congress recently placed some restrictions on the Department of Defense’s 1033 program—which militarizes law enforcement, especially in communities of color—we must do more. Between 2006 and 2014, law enforcement agencies received military equipment, including weapons designed for war, worth more than \$1.5 billion. Studies have shown that police departments are more likely to use force upon receiving military equipment. We must reduce funding for militarization in favor of initiatives that reduce poverty and prevent crime. Proper oversight of any equipment that does pass through these programs must be adequately funded, as well.

**Safeguard our immigrant and frontline workforce and their families.** For years, UnidosUS has worked with our Affiliates and coalition partners to protect the 11 million undocumented immigrants who call our country home. On average, undocumented immigrants have lived in the United States for 15 years or more. They collectively have 6 million children who are citizens and nearly 17 million other family members. Although they are only 3.2% of the U.S. population, they make up about 4.4% of the country's workforce. Despite not qualifying for most safety net programs, they contribute over \$120 billion in state and federal taxes each year. **Three out of four** undocumented immigrants are essential workers. Immigrants are key to our future prosperity, and your budget should reflect that reality.

- **Increase the limit on cancellation of removal for non-permanent residents.** Call on Congress to raise the arbitrary 4,000 cap on so-called non-LPR cancellation eligibility to: (a) address the ongoing non-LPR cancellation backlog; (b) eliminate the impending bottle neck in the program, which will likely see increased participation as the undocumented population ages; and (c) provide an avenue for family unity to undocumented members of mixed-status families. Similar to other proposed measures to modernize our legal immigration system, including recapturing unused visas and expediting employment visa processing, this would streamline avenues for family unity.
- **Report data on deported parents of U.S. children.** With the cooperation of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of State should continue to submit a semi-annual report to Congress on known citizens of the United States under the age of 18 years who must leave the U.S to remain with a parent or legal guardian who has been removed from the country. This information is critical to understanding and addressing the detrimental impacts of enforcement on U.S. citizen children.
- **Ensure your immigration enforcement priorities are permanent.** Your administration has made several **efforts to roll back** previous anti-immigrant policies. Nonetheless, barriers to a more balanced enforcement strategy remain, namely: (1) efforts by a heavily Trump-influenced judiciary to fulfill the former president's policies and (2) a chilling effect that has dissolved trust in the government, regardless of the administration. To permanently address this harm to our communities, call on Congress to pass into law the revised **enforcement criteria** and ensure performance metrics consistent with these criteria are regularly reported.
- **Designate \$100 million in funding for the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program.** This funding would be a civic, economic, and social investment that would benefit eligible Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs), their families and communities, and our nation. Facilitating the naturalization of LPRs would spur economic benefits, including higher rates of income, access to better paying jobs, and increased homeownership rates. This would strengthen local housing markets and our tax base. It would also provide civic benefits by allowing new citizens to vote, serve on a jury, and run for political office.

- **Establish a Newcomer Family Success Program.** This would support linguistically and culturally competent programs that provide immigrant parents and primary caregivers with integration knowledge and system navigation support, digital literacy and independent learning skills, strategies for supporting children’s school readiness and success, and the development of family integration success plans. It would serve as an onramp to other local resources and programming and should target the families with the greatest need. Eligible applicants would include partnerships between state-local government entities, culturally competent community organizations, school districts, early childhood systems, adult education providers, or businesses/trade associations.
- **Establish an English as a Gateway Program.** This grant program would provide integration, English language, and digital skills instruction to adult English language learners. This instruction would help them build their knowledge of U.S. history and civics; gain digital literacy; navigate the early childhood, K-12, and postsecondary education systems; gain financial literacy; build an understanding of the housing systems in the U.S.; learn about and access health care systems; or prepare for a high school equivalency diploma or postsecondary training or education.
- **Establish a State and Local Immigrant Integration Grant Program.** In recent years, the U.S. has increasingly established offices, policies, and programs focused on immigrant integration. This grant program would allow state and local governments to develop, implement or expand plans to introduce and integrate immigrants into the area by improving their access to key information and community resources. It would also enable local agencies to improve their referral mechanisms. Finally, it would build meaningful connections between immigrants and native-born residents.
- **Allocate funds to address immigration application backlogs.** USCIS has lengthy backlogs and wait times that keep applicants in limbo for immigration-related applications from work permits to naturalization. At the end of Fiscal Year 2021, USCIS had more than 8 million pending applications. USCIS needs robust funding to address these backlogs and improve our immigration system.
- **Allocate funds for the Recognition and Accreditation program at the Department of Justice.** Funding would increase staff capacity to address the backlog of pending applications from nonprofit organizations that provide immigration services. Due to insufficient staffing, the DOJ’s application processing timeline has increased from between two and four months to up to a year. While cases are trapped in the backlog, organizations are unable to provide new legal services or expand their capacity. They struggle to retain volunteers, and to provide accurate information on grant applications and reports. With additional funding, organizations will be able to better manage their programs and provide life-changing counsel to more low-income immigrants.

Ultimately, your budget must provide federal investments to help every family, worker, child, and student reach their full potential. Including the priorities and programs above will ensure that Latinos are fully included in this vision. Without them, critical needs will be left unmet, and Latinos' vast contributions to the social and economic fabric of our nation will be diminished.

Thank you in advance for putting forth a federal budget that fully and equitably includes Latinos for the benefit of all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Janet Murguía  
President and CEO  
UnidosUS