

April 13, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

On behalf of [UnidosUS](https://www.unidosus.org), I write to urge you to craft and advance a Fiscal Year 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Appropriations bill that funds critical health and education priorities 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.

It is time for Congress to deliver for our country's 62 million Latinos, who, for too long, have been disproportionately excluded from key federal investments. To that end, we urge you to target health and education resources to the Hispanic community to meaningfully advance racial equity with your FY2023 appropriations package.

Prior to COVID-19, Latinos had one of the highest uninsured [rates](#) in the country (20%), and the gains made by the Affordable Care Act for our community were [already beginning](#) to reverse course. The devastating effects of the revised public charge rule and the previous Administration's severe cuts to outreach and enrollment funding further jeopardized Latinos' access to health coverage. However, with the FY23 appropriations package, Congress has an opportunity to reverse these trends and advance health equity by supporting funding for critical health programs:

- **\$415 million for Consumer Assistance Programs.** The Affordable Care Act established a grant program for consumer assistance programs (CAPs) with initial funding of \$30

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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.

million, but Congress has not appropriated funding since. Nationwide, CAPs spent approximately [\\$413 million](#) during the first year of the ACA. Since that time, the health insurance system has only become more complex because of changes included in the *American Rescue Plan Act* and the *No Surprises Act*. Even prior to this, Latinos were [more likely](#) than non-Hispanic Whites to seek assistance. Today, [19 states](#) (including Arizona) have no CAPs. Increased funding for CAPs is a bipartisan policy idea and particularly important given the increase in the uninsured and the impact of recent legislation on health coverage.

- **\$77 million for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Program.** The REACH Program is the only investment in the federal budget solely devoted to addressing racial and ethnic health disparities through community-based, participatory initiatives with state and local health departments, tribes, universities, and community-based organizations. In FY2021, Congress appropriated \$64 million (including \$22 million for Indian country) for the REACH Program. Racial and ethnic health disparities have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and are widespread among various communities. The REACH Program has seen success in reducing obesity, [improving](#) hypertension management, and [addressing](#) disparities in HIV among Latinos. The average grant for the [40 programs](#) funded in 2020 was approximately \$715,000. An additional \$13 million investment in the REACH Program could potentially fund another 18 programs nationwide, including in states like Florida and Arizona that have large Latino populations but only one funding recipient each.
- **Additional \$15 million for Affordable Care Act (ACA) Navigator grants.** As America continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress should ensure access to health care remains a top priority. Free, community-based enrollment assistance provided by Navigators is an essential component of such efforts. [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, and Latinos are significantly more likely than other groups to seek out and use enrollment assistance. Navigators help to demystify the complexity of applying for and using health insurance, especially for those with potentially complex situations such as immigrants and mixed-status families, as well as individuals with limited English proficiency. Recent legislation creates the need to further increase Navigator funding. First, Congress has passed a new option for low-income adults in non-expansion states to enroll in the ACA Marketplace and receive subsidies. In addition, an [estimated 15 million Americans](#) will lose Medicaid coverage in the months following the end of the Public Health Emergency. One-third of the adults losing coverage after the PHE ends would be eligible for Marketplace coverage. Navigator assistance will be vital for maximizing the number of newly eligible adults who successfully enroll in the Marketplace coverage.

Additionally, within the next decade, Latinos will be one out of every three students in the United States. Even though Latino children are the [largest and youngest group of color](#), they continue to face significant challenges obtaining the resources they need to achieve a quality education. Failure to address these educational shortcomings will be to the detriment of all

Americans. Furthermore, the COVID-19 public health crisis and subsequent school closures have disrupted the education of millions of Latino students from early childhood through college, threatening further growth of the achievement gap experienced by the most underserved students. As such, we urge robust funding for educational programs that invest in the next generation of students:

- **\$32.1 billion for Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start, and Head Start programs.** To serve more children, particularly dual-language learners, these programs need increased funding. By 2060 an estimated one-third of three- and four-year-olds in the United States 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. Regrettably, only one in five Latino children nationwide read at a proficient level.
- **\$2 billion for Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** There are nearly five million English Learner (EL) students in our schools, or 10% of all K-12 students nationwide. Schools use Title III grants to supplement their programs designed to help ELs attain English proficiency and meet high academic standards, as well as to better integrate English learners into the school system. Federal funding for English language acquisition instruction has not kept pace with the growing population of EL students, and COVID relief funding was not-targeted to meet the unique and growing needs of these students during remote learning under the pandemic.
- **Double the maximum federal Pell Grant.** 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 the purchasing power to half the cost of college for a bachelor’s degree at an in-state, public institution.
- **\$350 million for the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) Program (Title V of the Higher Education Act).** DHSI helps Hispanic-serving institutions expand educational opportunities for Hispanic students. Strong funding for DHSI would help enhance academic offerings, program quality, and stability of these important institutions.
- **\$300 million for Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grants and other grants that incentivize partnerships between K–12 and higher education.** Investments in TQP should be focused on helping to increase the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the teaching profession. Specifically, the nation’s growing English learner (EL) student population needs a robust teacher workforce equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach them. Thirty-one states across the country are experiencing shortages of EL teachers, which will only exacerbate the academic achievement gap between ELs and their native English-speaking peers. TQP grants can support the development and strengthening of high-quality teacher preparation programs that enable graduates to meet licensure or certification requirements to teach ELs.

- **\$110 million for Retention and Completion Grants.** Supporting students' persistence and completion is critical to expanding access and affordability to higher education. Congress can ensure that colleges have the resources to provide evidence-based academic and culturally relevant services, such as direct support services, career coaching and networking opportunities, and career pathways, through programs that serve and assist individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Latinos as well as first-generation college students and students impacted by poverty.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and support of critical appropriations legislation that would fully and equitably include Latinos for the benefit of all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Rodriguez', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eric Rodriguez  
Senior Vice President  
Policy & Advocacy  
UnidosUS