

January 24, 2023

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

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of UnidosUS, I write to urge you to propose a FY2024 budget that builds on your domestic achievements, reduces historic racial and ethnic disparities, and advances equity for Latinos \* and working families.

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an **Affiliate Network** of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all Latinos, and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

Against considerable headwinds, 2022 ended with major accomplishments that will improve the lives of Latinos and all Americans, all made possible by your leadership, congressional action, and the robust advocacy of UnidosUS, our partners, and other advocates. These achievements include the recently passed Omnibus Appropriations bill that gives the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) powerful new tools to hold states accountable for protecting families' health coverage and makes meaningful investments in supporting English learners in public schools, low-income college students, and long-term immigrants who seek to naturalize. Another accomplishment, the Inflation Reduction Act, addresses Latino concerns about inflation and health care by helping millions of Americans pay for health coverage and prescription drugs, combats climate change, and ensures that the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes. Further, after the horrific shooting that took the lives of 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas—a tragedy that especially devastated the Hispanic community—Congress passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. With bipartisan support, this law represents a first step in stopping the plague of gun violence and will increase mental health resources and crisis

---

\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout our materials 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. Our materials may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

intervention programs, expand background checks for firearm purchasers, and close the “boyfriend loophole.” These and other hard-earned achievements have made a significant and positive difference for Latinos and the nation.

Despite this progress, several entrenched challenges remain which continue to prevent Latinos from reaching their full potential. By building upon your domestic agenda through your FY2024 budget and making transformative investments to level the playing field, Latinos and other communities of color will have increased access to opportunities to achieve their American Dream.

### **Support the economic empowerment and housing needs of Latinos.**

In recent years, our nation has experienced significant economic challenges that have hit Latinos particularly hard. During the pandemic, Latinos—compared to their White counterparts—were more likely to **lose their job**, take a **pay cut**, and suffer from **food and housing insecurity** even as they were **overrepresented** in the essential occupations that kept our country moving forward. Moreover, today’s higher prices for housing, food, gas, and other basic necessities have **harmed** Hispanics and other communities of color the most. These challenges are exacerbated by the staggering racial-ethnic wealth gap that Latinos face, resulting in lower access to homeownership and an overconcentration in jobs that offer low wages, poor health and retirement benefits, and high volatility. To support the economic empowerment and housing needs of Latinos, we urge you to include in your budget:

- **\$100 million for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’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. 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. In addition to helping workers when they hit hard times, the program helps aspiring homeowners manage the homebuying process, which helps create new generations of homeowners better positioned to break down historic cycles of poverty.
- **\$500 million for the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI Fund).** This fund promotes access to capital and local economic growth in urban and rural low-income communities throughout the nation. As private organizations focus 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.
- **\$10 billion for a First-Generation Down Payment Assistance program.** Housing equity accounts for **more than 57%** of Latino household wealth. 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. While we commend you for requesting a first-generation down payment assistance pilot program in your last budget, we urge you to call for a full and robust program that can address the needs of our time.

- **\$70 million for the 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.
- **Expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC).** In **2021**, the one-year expansion of the CTC included in the American Rescue Plan Act helped lift 5.3 million people out of poverty, including 2.9 million children and 1.2 million Latino children. Latino and Black children experienced the greatest benefits from the expanded CTC, as it significantly reduced the poverty rate from 29.1% to 8.4% and 25.2% to 8.3%, respectively. An expanded CTC with full refundability is one of the most effective ways of alleviating poverty and building equity for marginalized communities. That is why we urge you to use your budget to call on Congress to expand the CTC.

#### **Expand access to health coverage, immunizations, and nutrition initiatives.**

According to a recent **report** from the U.S. Census Bureau, racial disparities in health insurance coverage continue to persist, with Latinos having the highest uninsurance rate at 17.7%. Not only does this gap make it much more difficult for Hispanics to receive the basic medical care and treatments that they need, but it also hinders our ability to combat the ongoing pandemic, its subvariants, and other transmissible diseases. Without investments now, our country will pay a much higher cost later, both financially and in lives lost. To advance healthy communities, it is also necessary to remove federal obstacles that have long restricted Latinos' access to nutrition, particularly for those residing in Puerto Rico. We urge you to call for tangible results in promoting health and nutritional equity for Latinos by including in your budget:

- **\$2 billion for the Vaccines for Adults (VFA) program.** This program is part of a broader proposal you unveiled in your budget last year to provide \$25 billion over 10 years to expand vaccinations to the uninsured. The VFA program, modeled after the very effective Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, would help provide uninsured adults with vaccines recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, including COVID-19 vaccines, which will continue to be in need as we confront new variants.
- **\$994 million for the National Immunization Program.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Immunization Program supports the immunization

efforts of state and local health departments, community-based vaccine confidence campaigns, and the larger health system infrastructure to collect and report real-time immunization data. Latino adults experience significant immunization gaps. For example, during the **2021-2022 season**, only 38% of Hispanic adults received the flu shot, compared to 54% of Whites. The U.S. spends nearly **\$27 billion** a year treating illnesses that would have been prevented if everyone over age 50 had received the vaccines recommended for influenza, pneumonia, shingles, and the human papilloma virus. To keep hardworking Latino families healthy while saving significant health care dollars for taxpayers and employers, Congress should fully fund the National Immunization Program.

- **\$80 million for Affordable Care Act (ACA) Navigator grants.** Free, community-based enrollment assistance provided by Navigators is an essential component of efforts to increase the number of Americans with health insurance. **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 an everchanging health coverage landscape and applying for and using health insurance, especially for those with potentially complex situations such as immigrants and mixed-status families, as well as individuals who have limited English proficiency. As expanded Medicaid programs begin to unwind, ACA Navigator grants will be in greater need as consumers seek ways to maintain much-needed health coverage.
- **Support for equitable health care access and food security for citizens in Puerto Rico.** Unlike residents of the States and the District of Columbia, the ability of Puerto Rico residents to access health care through Medicaid is unfairly limited due to the structure of the territory's program. This denies U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico the same kind of support than citizens living in the States receive and leads to worse health outcomes. Health and economic crises, along with natural disasters such as Hurricane Fiona, further strain Puerto Rico's Medicaid program during the very circumstances for which it is designed to provide vital support for struggling families. We urge you to push for an end to this disparity in your FY2024 budget.

Residents in Puerto Rico also receive significantly less nutritional assistance than citizens living in the States. Its Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) is a federal block grant with fixed funding that obstructs the ability to fully meet the nutritional needs of the people, even when they face disasters. Unlike the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the States, federal dollars in Puerto Rico are rigidly capped regardless of need. It is time to correct this inequity and provide Puerto Rico with pathways to the SNAP benefit that serves other Americans, including in Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We urge you to call for an end to this nutritional disparity in your budget.

### **Strengthen the educational pipeline for Latino students.**

By 2030, **one in three students** in the U.S. will be Latino. Even though Latino children are the largest and youngest group of color, they face unique obstacles to a quality education. Latino students are more likely to lack academic support resources and high-speed internet and are more likely to face language barriers. Further, school closures during the pandemic disrupted learning for millions of Latino students, from early childhood through college—losses that we are still struggling to overcome. These realities necessitate robust funding for programs that develop our educational infrastructure and promote academic excellence, including:

- **\$2 billion for the English Language Acquisition Program.** Bilingualism and biliteracy have grown increasingly important in the U.S.— multilingual speakers provide benefits to both the economy and national security interests. The English Language Acquisition Program supports English learners (ELs) in every state and territory; however, funding has not kept pace with the ever-growing population of nearly **five million** EL students. Schools use these grants to supplement their programs designed to help ELs—10% of total students—attain English proficiency and meet high academic standards, while better integrating these students into the school system.
- **\$200 million for Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG).** Today, Latinos **account** for one out of every five postsecondary students. Pre-pandemic, Latinos had the largest enrollment growth of any other racial or ethnic group. Despite these gains, Latinos complete college and graduate with a degree at lower rates than other groups, contributing to long-term disparities in debt, wealth accumulation, and economic security. Colleges need resources to provide evidence-based academic and culturally relevant services that support retention and completion.
- **\$32 billion for Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant Head Start programs.** These school readiness programs provide critical childhood educational, health, and nutritional investments for families living in poverty. Yet, for several years, they have been woefully underfunded. In particular, Head Start programs have experienced an estimated 20% increase in operational costs resulting from the pandemic, which has not been fully addressed by Congress.
- **Doubling the maximum federal Pell Grant to \$14,790.** Pell Grants provide one of the most effective tools in ensuring that low-income students can attend college and learn the skills necessary for financial success. While we appreciate that Congress increased the individual Pell Grant by \$500 in the 2023 omnibus legislation, Congress should double 2024 funding to \$14,790. 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.

### **Safeguard and facilitate the full integration of our immigrant community.**

It is profoundly disappointing that Congress once again failed to provide a pathway to citizenship or meaningful protections from deportation for our undocumented students and families, colleagues, and neighbors, even after this community played an outsized role in

getting our country back on track during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, undocumented immigrants have lived in the U.S. for **15 years** or more. Collectively, they include **6 million children** who are citizens and nearly **17 million** other family members. Despite not qualifying for most safety net programs, they contribute more than **\$120 billion** in state and federal taxes each year. Immigrants, both undocumented and those with legal status, increase our labor force at a time of great need, fuel our productivity, and advance our competitive edge. They are key to our future prosperity, and your budget should reflect that reality by including:

- **\$100 million for the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program.** This funding is 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.
- **\$765 million to address immigration application backlogs.** The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has lengthy backlogs and wait times that keep applicants in limbo for immigration-related applications—from work permits to naturalization. As of April 2022, USCIS had more than **8 million** pending applications. USCIS needs robust funding to address the backlog of applications for work authorization, naturalization, adjustment of status, asylum caseloads, and other immigration benefits and to improve our immigration system.
- **\$3.5 million increase for the Recognition and Accreditation Program at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).** This 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.
- **Establishment of a Newcomer Family Success program.** The establishment and funding of this grant program would support linguistically and culturally competent programs that provide immigrant parents and primary caregivers with the knowledge they need to fully and successfully integrate into the United States. The program would help families navigate local systems and develop digital literacy and independent learning skills, and would develop strategies for supporting children’s school readiness and ongoing school success and family integration success plans, which will serve as on-ramps to other local resources and programming. Eligible grant applicants would include partnerships that



could comprise state and local government entities, culturally competent community organizations, school districts, early childhood systems, adult education providers, and businesses/trade associations.

- **Making permanent your immigration enforcement priorities.** While we commend your administration for **rolling back** previous anti-immigrant policies, barriers to cultivating a more balanced enforcement strategy persist. In 2021, a federal judge **blocked** your effort to narrow deportation enforcement to immigrants who pose a threat to national security, border security, or public safety. Congress should, therefore, ensure that immigration enforcement funding and reporting requirements are contingent upon the operationalization of the revised enforcement criteria set forth by Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas's **guidance**. To secure our nation, protect families, and save taxpayer dollars, your budget should include language that calls on Congress to codify your enforcement priorities.
- **Restricting transfer and reprogramming authority for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO).** Current law has long provided ICE discretion to reprogram funds within appropriations and transfer funds between them, to the detriment of immigrants and the Latino community. We are deeply concerned about the agency's abuse and manipulation of this provision to increase its own resources for detention and enforcement, often despite congressional nonconurrence. To prevent any future weaponization of ICE's enforcement capacity and to establish oversight and accountability, your budget should include language that calls on Congress to restrict the transfer and reprogramming authority for ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations.

### **Protect our hard-earned civil rights.**

Our country continues to endure a pervasive form of structural racism that harms the economic and educational well-being and health of Latinos. At the same time, women's access to reproductive health continues to be attacked in numerous states. The federal government has an obligation to protect the civil and reproductive rights that generations before us fought so hard to achieve. These protections are necessary for the full inclusion of the Hispanic community into our nation's social fabric. Thus, we strongly urge you to fight for our civil rights by including in your 2024 budget the following:

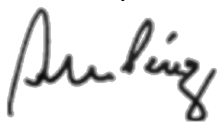
- **Conditioning law enforcement grants on data requirements that advance accountability.** Time and again, we have witnessed abuses and injustices committed by law enforcement officials against people of color. Congress cannot continue to provide a blank check to state and local law enforcement agencies without measures that promote accountability. Federal grant programs such as the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program and Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants should be conditioned on the recipients' consistent collection, reporting, and publication of data that are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, sex, English language

proficiency, housing status, and other indicators that shine light on police interactions with the communities they serve.

- **\$490 million for the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).** Latinos, like everyone else, have shifted online to shop, learn, earn, participate in civic life, and create community, and to access jobs, financial products, and business opportunities. Sadly, moving our lives online has created opportunities for digital bias and discrimination—some of which replicate older forms, while others provide novel opportunities for harm. The FTC currently lacks the resources required to grow staff expertise and bring enforcement actions needed to address civil rights and consumer protection implications of the digital ecosystem. With increased funding, the FTC will be able to grow its enforcement capacities, including by hiring additional staff with expertise on issues at the intersection of civil rights, privacy, and technology.
- **Ensuring that federal resources cannot be used to support state and local surveillance and investigations of reproductive health activities.** Following last summer’s decision by the Supreme Court in *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, concerns about the surveillance of individuals’ reproductive lives have heightened. Of particular concern are the harmful effects of evolving abortion bans compounded by increased surveillance throughout the country, including private reproductive health data and geolocation information that can be gathered from mobile apps and social media platforms. Currently, federal funding structures allow for invasive surveillance and investigative assistance to state and local law enforcement. We urge you to call on Congress to establish legal guardrails that would prevent federal funds from being used for the purposes of abortion-related surveillance, investigation, or prosecution by state or local law enforcement agencies.

Since becoming President, you have delivered major accomplishments that have advanced equity for the Hispanic community in a meaningful way, making our country’s future much brighter. But without additional, targeted investments and policy changes, this progress will falter. We urge you to build on what you have accomplished and champion a transformative budget that can help ensure that all Latinos—a community that is 62 million people strong—live to their full potential. The prosperity and future of our nation depends on it.

Sincerely,



Sonia M. Pérez  
Acting CEO and Chief Operating Officer  
UnidosUS