

March 27, 2023

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

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
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 Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

On behalf of **UnidosUS**, I write to urge you to support appropriations legislation that improves and advances health and education priorities for Latinos* and their families.

UnidosUS 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.

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 transmissible diseases. Without investments now, our country will pay a much higher cost later both financially and in lives lost. We urge you to call for tangible results in promoting health equity for Latinos by including in your appropriations legislation:

- **\$1.1 billion 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

* 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.

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 papillomavirus. To keep hardworking Latino families healthy while saving significant health care dollars for taxpayers and employers, Congress should fully fund the National Immunization Program.

- **Vaccines for Adults (VFA) program.** This is a proposal the President unveiled in his budget to provide \$11.7 billion in mandatory spending 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.
- **\$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.
- **Equitable health care access for citizens in Puerto Rico.** Unlike residents of the Continental United States and the District of Columbia, Puerto Ricans' ability 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 that 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.

By 2030, **one in three students** in the U.S. will be Latino. Latino children are the largest and youngest group of color, and 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—disruptions 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 school 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 addition, Head Start programs have experienced an estimated 20% increase in operational costs resulting from the pandemic, which has not been fully addressed by Congress.
- **Double 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.

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 priorities. To that end, we urge you to deliver on your commitments to advance racial equity by supporting funding for critical health and education programs.

Sincerely,



Eric Rodriguez
Senior Vice President
Policy and Advocacy
UnidosUS