



# New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force



Hon. Carl E. Heastie, Speaker  
Hon. Marcos A. Crespo, Chairman

Winter 2015/2016



## ***A Message from Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo Chair, New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force***

*On March 9, 2015, Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie appointed me to the Chairmanship of the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force. As with previous chairs, I took the helm of this dynamic organization at an important point in national and state history. Two weeks later, the Task Force hosted its 28th annual legislative conference, and I released a disturbing report on the unprecedented rise in Latino children poverty in New York which made national news. In May, a subsequent Task Force report on Latino elderly poverty rates showed our senior citizens are the hardest hit by this phenomenon.*

*In September of this year, the US Census identified three New York cities as being in the top ten in the nation with the highest concentration of Latinos living in poverty. Syracuse, NY ranks first in the nation with this ominous distinction.*

*The Task Force has zeroed in on this problem as a prime legislative focus and recently has held statewide hearings with the Assembly Standing Committees on Children and Families, Social Services and Aging. Under the leadership of Speaker Heastie and committee chairs Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Andrew Hevesi, and Steven Cymbrowitz, a discussion on concrete public policy initiatives to combat poverty in our state has begun in time for action in the 2016 Legislative Session.*

*The work of the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force has encompassed many more areas of concern to our communities and our state. Throughout this newsletter you will find brief descriptions of our diligence in addressing a variety of issues vital to the improvement of our neighborhoods and necessary to strengthening our families.*

*I look forward to my tenure as Chairman and working with my colleagues at all levels of government to address the many problems that lie before us as they impact New York's growing Latino communities and consequently all New Yorkers. The demographic snapshot provided below clearly shows why the work of the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force is imperative!*

*Thank you.*

*Marcos A. Crespo*  
Marcos A. Crespo  
Member of Assembly



***Assemblyman Robert Rodriguez discusses education issues with student and school administrator in East Harlem while attending a Back to School Event.***



***Assemblyman Luis Sepulveda meets with students from JHS 127 to discuss funding for technology in schools.***

## **Demographic Snapshot: Every Minute, Two More Latinos in the United States of America**

The US Census now estimates that by 2065, there will be 114 million Latinos in the United States, up from the current 56 million. That translates into one more Latino in the US every 30 seconds, and the majority of this growth will be due to births not due to immigration.

The nation as a whole has been undergoing tremendous demographic changes. Over the past 50 years, 55% of the population growth has been due to immigration. The Census predicts that by 2065, 90% of the total population growth of the United States, other than Latino, will be due to immigration.

The demographic changes on our society and economy will be tremendous.

In 2014, Latino purchasing power had grown to an estimated \$1.7 trillion annually from \$1.2 trillion in 2012. The annual GDP of the United States was about \$18 trillion last year, with Latinos

contributing just over \$1.5 trillion to the matrix of all economic activity in our nation. This is not an insignificant figure. The current Latino consumer market is larger than the entire economies of all but 11 countries in the world, according to a recent report by the University of Georgia and others.

In New York State, Latino economic activity generated over 25% of the state's \$1.2 trillion GDP in 2013. In other words, over \$300 billion annually is the impact of the Latino purchasing power in the Empire State.

While these numbers are impressive, the reality is that they can be much higher if doors of opportunity are opened for Latinos in both the higher education and work force sectors. A good education translates into higher incomes and that increases the spending power and influence. More on both of these issues follow in this periodical.

## Crisis in Puerto Rico

The late Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, speaking on the financial turmoil and poverty in the 1990s in his country once said, “How sad for Mexico. So close to the United States yet so far from God.” He was referring to the inability of the United States to become a better neighbor and partner in Mexico’s economic development agenda.

Almost 30 years later, and closer to the United States, legally speaking, Puerto Rico has a crushing \$72 billion debt, a health care sector in crisis due to inadequate federal reimbursement rates for Medicaid, a brain drain, and mass exodus that is dramatically impacting the future of this commonwealth. Washington has failed to act to address Puerto Rico’s economic problems. The White House, the US Treasury, the Federal Reserve and Congress all have it within their power to assist the island and its 3.5 million US citizens. After paying its December 1, 2015 bond obligation of \$350 million, and imminent default on billions predicted by the Governor of the island, our federal government has shown little concern.

The current crisis includes the possible collapse of the island’s

health care system, which is struggling to cope with decades of underfunding by the federal government. This is leading to the flight of health professionals to the mainland as clinics close their doors, the delay of health services, which is leading to patient flight to mainland for medical care, and the possible closure of hospitals already straining to address long waiting lists for care, which has already lead to preventable deaths.

In 1995, Washington bailed out the Mexican economy with a \$35 billion infusion to stabilize its economy. This was part of a \$50 billion assistance package that included the International Monetary Fund and the G7. With this in mind, it is clear that the help Puerto Rico needs is possible if the political will to help exists. More on this issue can be found in the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force report titled, “Puerto Rico in Crisis: Debt, Poverty and Mass Exodus” via the link below:

<http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/PRHisp/20151029/index.pdf>



*Assemblywoman Carmen Arroyo remarks on the floor of the New York State Assembly during vote on education funding.*



*Assemblywoman Maritza Davila visits a vendor with island crafts during the annual Puerto Rican Day Parade.*

## Latino Child Poverty: The Shame of a Nation

In late March of 2015, and as a prelude to the annual legislative conference of the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, Assemblyman Crespo released a report documenting the alarming high rate of child poverty throughout New York State. The report documented Latino child poverty rates closing in on 60% in all Upstate cities, with Schenectady, NY having a rate of 70.9%. The report, with a detailed map of the problem, generated statewide media attention. Assemblyman Crespo formally asked the Assembly Standing Committees on Social Services and Children and Families to hold statewide hearings to examine the problem and solutions. Three hearings were held between August and September to hear

from experts on this crushing economic data impacting the entire state. In addition, a second report focused on rising poverty rates for the elderly was released by the Task Force in May of 2015. Both reports can be found via the links provided below:

More on this issue can be found at:

<http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Marcos-A-Crespo/story/63793/>

**Child Poverty Report:** <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/PRHisp/20150311/index.pdf>

**Elderly Poverty Report:** <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/PRHisp/20150430/index.pdf>

### ISSUE BRIEF:

The work of the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force has led to progress on several fronts impacting immigrants. The Task Force was able to help restore cuts to legal services for immigrants throughout New York, including helping to increase the capacity of the Albany Law School Immigration Law Clinic to assist underserved Upstate communities.

With the assistance of the New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, the Task Force was able to pinpoint failures by the State Education Department (SED) to adequately help the children of migrant farmworkers.

Annually, New York receives tens of millions of dollars to help facilitate the educational attainment of the children of migrants who work seasonally in our state’s agriculture industry. An audit by the Comptroller requested by the Task Force found specific problems in the Migrant Education Program. The audit also provided detailed corrective actions which SED has agreed to undertake. The agreement will be continually monitored by the Task Force.

## Rising Oceans: Perils for the Caribbean Basin & Impact on NYS

Within weeks of taking the helm as chair of the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, Assemblyman Crespo convened a conference call to hear from international experts on the dangers of climate change to Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean Basin. While global warming is gradually taking its tolls on societies across our planet and its impact on the United States is being evaluated, rising ocean levels are already impacting island nations and coast lines in the Caribbean Basin. Worst forecasts show major land loss for those countries which will set off a tremendous humanitarian crisis as countries impacted will seek refugee assistance and relief from the United States. Due to the large and existing immigrant communities in New York from this region, the devastation caused by rising ocean levels will trigger a mass immigration into the Empire State by impacted groups.

An internationally recognized panel of experts discussed the issue during a free conference call and webinar. They reviewed current forecasts on rising ocean levels and their impact on the Caribbean Basin nations and American territories. The group discussed actions that can be taken to minimize environmental impact and the need for a plan for the mass refugee crisis which will be caused as coastal human displacement in large scales will be triggered by rising oceans due to climate change.

## ISSUE BRIEF:

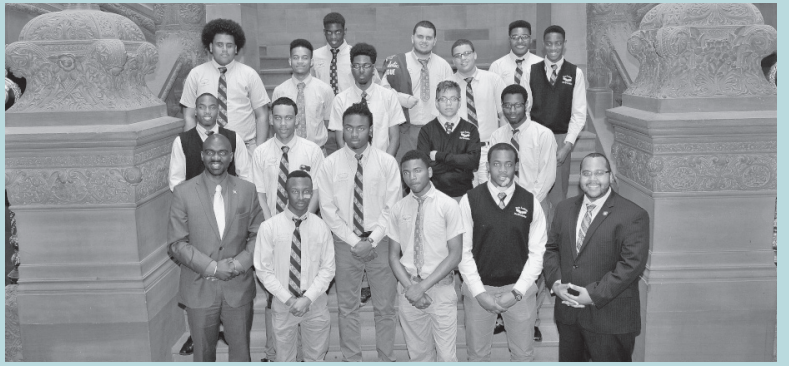
Several bills which would allow the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles to grant licenses to undocumented drivers are pending. Twelve states and the District of Columbia already allow such privilege, without any problems. However, New York State is not among them.

The pending bills are:

S.3607 ESPAILLAT / COLTON

S.2237 PERALTA / SEPULVEDA

A.6849 CRESPO



*Assemblyman Victor Pichardo (far right) meets with Eagle Academy School students to discuss their concerns and the school's efforts to empower young men of color to become future leaders.*

## Improving College Success Rates & Faculty Diversity

With new data showing that Latino high school students are enrolling in college at higher rates than their Caucasian counterparts, The Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force has renewed its focus on working to improve access, affordability and college completion for Latino students. The Task Force successfully advocated for additional funding for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion of the State University of New York (ODEI). The office was created in 2007 after almost a year of discussions and fact finding travel between then SUNY Chancellor John Ryan, former Task Force Chair Peter M. Rivera, United University Professions (UUP) Latino Affairs Chair Dr. Raul Huerta and top staff of the assemblyman and the chancellor. ODEI operates all of SUNY's diversity programs but its budget had been stagnant for years, even as more demands and larger numbers of Latinos and other minorities are enrolling in SUNY.

In one of his first duties after assuming the Chairmanship of the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, Assemblyman Marcos Crespo initiated a set of meetings and conversations with SUNY Chairman of the Board of Trustees H. Carl McCall on improving faculty and staff diversity on its 64 campuses. Presently less than 4% of SUNY professors and professional staff are Latino. Simultaneously, the Task Force, with the leadership of Speaker Carl E. Heastie, helped secure an additional \$600,000 for the Minority Graduate Scholarship program.

In early September, Assemblyman Crespo was invited to address

the SUNY Board of Trustees on the Task Force's diversity priorities. The day after that meeting the SUNY Board approved a ten-page diversity policy for all its campuses; making the new diversity efforts the most comprehensive of any state college system in the nation. Under the leadership of Chairman McCall, these new policies will improve diversity in a education system that serves almost 500,000 students each year.

The new policies give unprecedented authority and input to the Chief Diversity Officer positions which will be created on each campus and requires regular reporting to the legislature on diversity policy goals and achievements, improves the recruitment mechanism to help increase the number of minority faculty and staff on all its campuses, and makes college presidents accountable for improving diversity on campuses.

In addition, SUNY has agreed to work with the Task Force on STEM outreach and enrichment options for pre-college students and to help identify top talent for college president and senior positions in the college system. SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, who had created a diversity workgroup as forecasts of the huge change in student demographics engulfed the country, has been a leader in ensuring that SUNY is well positioned to serve the growing rates of minority students entering the State's college system.



*Assemblyman Guillermo Linares, Chair of the Assembly Subcommittee on Outreach and Oversight of Senior Citizen Programs, speaks during a vote in the Assembly Chamber.*



*Assemblyman Crespo joins advocates from throughout the state to call for additional funding for emergency food programs.*

## Hunger on the Rise, Task Force Fights for More Funds

In a world out of balance, faced with the twin epidemics of hunger and obesity, New York faces both of these challenges. As the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force began its work to address alarmingly high rates of Latino child poverty across New York and on Latino elderly having the highest rates of poverty of all seniors, it also engaged itself in securing additional funding for food pantries and soup kitchens across the state. The Task Force led the call by legislators on the Governor to secure an additional \$16.5 million to feed the growing number of New Yorkers relying on emergency food services to feed themselves and their families. Food pantries across the state have shut down their operations for lack of funding at the same time that there is a demand from the growing poor population for access to food relief.

The Task Force continues to work on this issue and it will be one of its major priorities for the 2016 Legislative Session. "According to five decades of data, wages have been flat or even falling since 1964 regardless of job growth cycles. Over the past 25 years alone, food prices have increased by an average of 2.5% per year. That means that the cost of feeding our families has increased by over 62% while wages have been stagnant. What other evidence than hunger do we need to demonstrate that the current minimum wage is inadequate, insufficient and intolerable! It is clear to me that any effort focused on lifting working families and their children out of poverty must include a wage that gives them the ability to feed, house and clothe themselves without the fear of homelessness or going hungry," Assemblyman Crespo stated at a recent press conference.



*Assemblyman Philip Ramos, Chair of the Angelo Del Toro Puerto Rican/Hispanic Youth Leadership Conference, speaks to students from across New York State during their Mock Session in Albany.*

## Focusing on Lack of Latinos in New York State's Government Workforce

- *In 2014, there were fewer Hispanics working in state government than 10 years before.*
- *In 2004, 6,515 Hispanics composed 3.8% of the state workforce of over 168,000 employees.*
- *In 2014, only 6,142 Hispanics were employed out of the state government workforce of over 131,000.*

Today, we have almost 400 fewer Hispanics working in state agencies even though the Hispanic share of the general workforce and the state population has increased substantially over the past decade.

In fact, it is projected that between 2012 thru 2020, Hispanics will account for 75% of the labor force growth across the nation. Hispanics also have a higher labor force participation rate than all other groups at 67%. The labor force participation rate is measured by the share of population, 16 and older, either employed or looking for work. This means that almost 7 out of every 10 Hispanics are active in the labor force.

Currently, the Hispanic share of the U.S. labor force is 18% and will rise to 21% in 2020. This means almost 1 in five workers will be Hispanic by 2020.

Today, almost 4.1 million Hispanics live in NYS. Yet even with

their high workforce participation rates and increased college completion rates, entrenched and biased hiring practices have made Hispanics almost non-existent in the government workforces of the state and its municipalities. The impact is hundreds of millions of dollars in yearly lost wages for Hispanic communities.

This problem goes beyond New York State agencies. The Department of Civil Service, via exams, controls over 650,000 municipal jobs throughout the State. The under representation of Hispanics in municipal level workforces is also a pressing problem.

In 2005, The New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force released a report documenting the problem and set forward a legislative agenda to help remedy the situation. "Black and Hispanics Need Not Apply: The Underrepresentation of Minorities in NYS Government Workforce" created a discussion on the problem and helped one of its proposals to become state law.

Then-Governor Pataki signed Chapter 705 of the Laws of 2006 which created the Commission to Increase Minority Participation in State Government Workforce. Part of the Commission's statutorily mandated work was completed but after 2010, the new Administration failed to reconvene the group as required by law.

More information on this issue and a list of Task Force legislation introduced to resolve this problem can be found in the Task Force report titled, "Hispanics Need Not Apply" via the link below:  
<http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/PRHisp/20151116/index.pdf>

## Fighting Elderly Poverty and for Economic Security

In May of 2015, the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force released a report documenting the high rate of poverty faced by the elderly. With few exceptions, Latino elderly have the highest rates of poverty of all ethnic and racial groups in New York State. A subsequent report by the New York State-Wide Senior Action Council documented that as 80% of Latina elderly are living in poverty. The report can be found here: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/PRHisp/20150430/index.pdf>

The problem could and will get much worse for New York's elderly and not just for Latino elderly because today the majority of workers have jobs that do not provide a retirement savings plans like a pension or 401-K account.

Access to a workplace retirement savings plan differs substantially by race and ethnicity. AARP research has found that about 67 percent of Hispanic workers, 52 percent of African Americans, and 36 percent of Asian Americans lacked access to an employer-provided retirement plan. Minorities accounted for about 47 percent (1,649,000) of the roughly 3,507,000 em-

ployees without a workplace retirement plan in New York.

To correct this problem with major negative implications for our State, Assemblyman Robert Rodriguez has introduced legislation (Assembly Bill 8332-A) which establishes the New York State Secure Choice Savings Program. This proposal is strongly supported by the members of the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force.

The program would create a self-sustaining retirement savings option through an automatic IRA payroll deduction for private sector employees who currently have no way to save for the future through their workplace. The savings account would be portable and the employee could opt out at any time. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has initiated such a program but the state must do the same.

The proposal would give millions of New Yorkers access to savings options through their place of employment so they could build their own economic security and reduce the high rates of elderly poverty now so pervasive in our state.



For more information on any of these issues, contact Guillermo A. Martinez, Legislative Director of the NYS Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force at 518-455-5514