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## **Rhode Island Latino Elected Officials and the Latino Policy Institute Release Latino Impact Plan**

*Report Examines Barriers Faced by Latino Community throughout the COVID-19 Crisis and Provides Recommendations for Improving the Statewide Continued Response*

**PROVIDENCE, RI** – Latino Policy Institute Director Marcela Betancur today joined Mayor Jorge O. Elorza, Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea, Central Falls City Councilwoman Maria Rivera and other Rhode Island Latino elected leaders board announce the release of the [Latino Impact Plan](#), a report that examines the inequities and barriers Rhode Island Latinos have faced prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing recommendations for improving the continued response across the state.

“COVID-19 has devastated our communities and has further highlighted the challenges our neighbors of color face every day, impacting their everyday quality of life,” said Mayor Jorge Elorza. “It is our responsibility to work towards reducing barriers and addressing those inequities in culturally responsive ways that ensures a more equitable future for our cities and state. I want to thank the Latino Policy Institute for their continued advocacy in this field.”

The report examines the impact of COVID-19 within the Latino community across three issue areas: economic equity, health, and education. Where the Latino workforce in Rhode Island has grown by nearly 40 percent in the last decade, Latinos have also disproportionately represented in the state’s unemployment rate, with a 20 percent unemployment rate during the Great Recession. Initial estimates are showing a similar trend as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, as only 12 percent of Black and Latino owned small businesses received federal Paycheck Protection Program Loans and reports as of June 2020 have found that 41 percent of Black owned and 32 percent of Latino businesses were forced to close.

“We have known about these barriers for decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made the need for dramatic change immediate,” said Executive Director Marcela Betancur. “Our community has continued to advocate for these supports, the research has shown why it’s important, and now it’s on each and

every one of us to implement the supports needed so that every Rhode Islander has equal opportunity to thrive within their community.”

In looking at access to healthcare before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Latino uninsured rate stood at over 24 percent while Rhode Island’s overall rate stood at six percent. Though the Emergency Medicare program was expanded to cover individuals who are uninsured, encouraging those individuals to seek care, a successful recovery requires securing necessary and basic health care. The report further outlines the ways in which amplifying support for holistic care serves a critical role in a successful continued response on the local level.

“Rhode Islanders’ health should not depend on their zip code,” said Secretary of State and RILEO board member Nellie M. Gorbea. “Unfortunately, the inequities we’re seeing with COVID are not new. Latinos tend to be hit harder by crises – financial, health or otherwise. But we have the power to change that. Each year one million Latino citizens turn 18 across the U.S. That’s an incredible source of power to change these inequities by voting and filling out the census.”

Lastly, the report takes an in-depth look at the systemic inequities in the Rhode Island education system that disproportionately affect low-income communities and were exacerbated by the transition to social distance learning. For these communities, lack of access to technology; underfunded Districts that struggled to provide teachers and administrators the supports needed to be successful; and the additional burden for parents to support their child’s learning.

“Central Falls has been hit particularly hard by this pandemic, exacerbating equity issues in our Latinx community that makes up two thirds of our city,” said Central Falls City Council President and RILEO Board Member Maria Rivera. “Addressing specific barriers our families and small businesses are facing has been a top priority, from food and financial insecurities to health and supply needs. Many of our families continue to experience incredible hardship, particularly those who are undocumented and ineligible for benefits like food stamps or unemployment. We need greater, specific supports that provide our Latinx community with equal opportunity to live well within our community.”

Upon examining these three subject areas, the report provides seven recommendations to address the highlighted barriers and inequities:

- Strengthening Workers Protections
- Continuous Injection of Capital for all Small Businesses
- Rent and Mortgage Assistance
- Healthcare Coverage for all Children
- Equitable Funding for Distressed School Districts
- Generating New Revenue
- Inclusive Statewide Communications and Engagement

It additionally calls for strengthened community engagement and increasing accessible communications, centering the voices of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable throughout the state’s continued response to COVID-19.

This report is compiled by RILEO, a board comprised of 24 elected officials across the state. Under the direction of the Latino Policy Institute, the Latino Impact Plan was commissioned by the board in May in an effort to develop strategic local and statewide recommendations that would take into account the unique barriers and opportunities that Rhode Island Latinos face due to the impacts of COVID-19.

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### **About the Latino Policy Institute**

The Latino Policy Institute stimulates public policy discourse by objectively examining and communicating the evolving Latino experience in Rhode Island. LPI is a leader in providing information and analysis of the Latino community in order to influence decision and policymaking to achieve greater social, political, and economic equity.