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April 7, 2003

Sheila Leslie, Assemblywoman
Nevada State Assembly
825 Humboldt
Reno, Nevada 89502

Dear Ms. Leslie:

Good Afternoon Members of the Education Committee and supporters of AB382 which calls for the establishment of the UNR Latino Institute for Research and Advocacy.

I would like to begin my testimony by thanking Assemblywoman Sheila Leslie and members of the Education Committee for the foresight to propose what will be very far reaching legislation for the State of Nevada and its Latino community.

I speak to you today as an individual that has worked on community issues within the state for over 20 years. As a Community Development Planner for the City of Reno, I worked in areas of the Reno/Sparks community to enhance the quality of life for low-income residents. Most recently as the Interim Director for the Ethnic Student Resource Center located on the UNR campus I have worked with low-income first generation students and have first hand knowledge about the lack of focus on issues impacting Latino's.

Building community begins when the community involved has access to the process, has the opportunity to provide input, and is invested in the outcome. Through no fault of their own, the Latino community within the state of Nevada has had limited access to the decision making process that often impacts them in negative ways. A lack of research capacity and ability to disseminate pertinent information has for too long hindered the Latino community's ability to create a common vision and work towards its implementation.

It has been stated and you will no doubt here this from much of the testimony today, that the Latino community within the State of Nevada is the largest and fastest growing ethnic population. According to the State Demographer Latino's represent 18.6% of the state's population and it is believed that this estimate is low, that indeed Latino's easily make up more than 23% of the state's population.

- Although the Latino community is the fastest growing population nationally and within the state of Nevada, there is a notable lack of research and advocacy on their behalf. Much of this is due to a lack of centralized location for the generation of information that can educate the grassroots community as well as policy makers, on the needs of the Latino community.

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION

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SUBMITTED BY: LAURA JARGAS

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- Community based organizations are limited in number and are charged with providing direct service activities. Their non-profit status limits funding and their ability to collect and disseminate data pertinent to the Latino community.
- There are considerations and factors that impact the Latino community that are outside of the mainstream considerations for policy making (i.e. issues on immigration, language, and cultural barriers) that are not readily addressed by existing organizations due to a lack of available data and research.
- There is a lack of concrete information on the impact of immigration on our state.

A strong indicator of the Latino's potential to provide state leadership is represented in the number of young Latino's who seek higher education within the state. The UCCSN system boasts the attendance of Latino students enrolled in community colleges and our two universities. Yet, even with increased enrollment, there are still many Latino's that face barriers in our K-12 system and home lives that never allow them to even consider the opportunity of higher education. For many, dropping out of school to obtain a minimum wage job to assist in supporting the family, is the only "opportunity" they have had presented to them. Financial constraints pose a significant handicap to higher educational attainment within the Latino population. This is compounded by the legal status of an immigrant student that cannot receive federal financial aid or work to support attendance at college. And there still remain the low expectations of Latino students held by educators.

In September of 2002, the U.S. President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans report titled, *The Road to a College Diploma: The Complex Reality of Raising Educational Achievement for Hispanics in the United States*, identified five strategic imperatives:

- Coordinating a national campaign for action that will integrate the efforts of students, parents, educators, community and business leaders and public officials at the local, state and Federal levels.
- Developing a public awareness campaign to raise the ceiling of educational aspirations for Latino families hindered by barriers mentioned earlier.
- Establishing short and long term strategies and goals that can be measured for successful impact.
- Abandoning One-Size-Fits-All Thinking. Integrating the diversity of Latino attitudes, culture, and socio-economic status in program development.
- Asking What Works and For Whom. I quote directly from this strategic imperative: "Our research data were woefully insufficient concerning the impact of important characteristics such as nationality, legal status and

linguistic challenges on the academic success of Hispanic children. We know far too little about which program or strategies work best and for whom. We need new research."

The UNR Latino Institute will be an effective measure in working to build community among Latino's within the state of Nevada. Establishing partnerships with the State of Nevada, Washoe County, Clark County, and the state's rural communities, the Institute will produce and disseminate research that will aid policy makers in their decision-making as it relates to the Latino community. Providing outreach to Latino youth in the community, the Institute will provide leadership building and retention programming to encourage their potential for success. Utilizing the talent of researchers and social change agents, through symposia and research collaboratives, the Institute can pursue significant social and academic contributions to the enhancement of the Latino community, on a local and national level.

In keeping with the Strategic Plan of the University of Nevada, the Latino Institute supports the following Objectives and Strategies:

1. Educate:

- Increase research and creative opportunities for undergraduates
- Hire more faculty to insure that students are taught by permanent faculty
- Increase the number of nationally ranked and recognized research programs

2. Explore:

- Hire and retain top faculty, including raising funds to establish endowed chairs and a Distinguished Scholars Program that would attract nationally prominent scholars to the faculty in selected enhancement areas
- Community recognition of signature scholarship, research, and creative activity

3. Engage:

- Make the university more accessible to community members seeking information, expertise, and collaborative action
- Collaborate with community stakeholders to ascertain needs that UNR can address
- Understand and help to meet state economic, environmental, and social needs where university expertise is relevant

4. Enhance

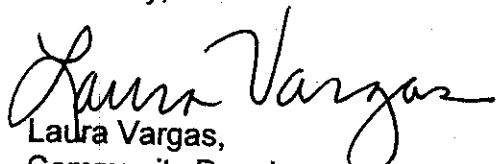
- Foster a culture that embraces diversity
- Utilize targeted recruiting strategies and implement creative tactics to improve diversity in our applicant pools
- Support the development of fellowship programs in many disciplines for traditionally underrepresented groups
- Improve the retention and promotion of faculty of color
- Make (bilingual) scholarship information available at orientation, throughout the semester, and on the web

In addition, the UNR, Latino Institute will develop and continually cultivate collaborative relationships with on and off campus entities, programs, departments, colleges, or services that focus on Latino issues. It will maintain working relationships with other Latino based institutes so information is shared on a national basis.

There are a number of existing models of Institutes affiliated with universities that were developed with the intention of enhancing the quality of life for the Latino populations within their state. These institutes have served as a valuable resource for policy makers, educators, social and health services, and have continued to benefit the states they are serving.

Let us not remain blind to the potential of a people who carry a share of this state's burden, who contribute to its economy, who have made this state their home. Please support the establishment of the UNR Latino Institute for Advocacy in Education, Research, and Policy. It is a healthy investment in this state and its people.

Sincerely,


Laura Vargas,
Community Development Coordinator
University of Nevada