

Report of the 2023 SOMOS Inc. New York
Conference Legislative Workshops:

Strengthening and Supporting Our Communities



Assembly Member Karines Reyes, R.N., Chairperson
NYS ASSEMBLY & SENATE PUERTO RICAN / HISPANIC TASK FORCE



Report of the 2023 SOMOS Inc. New York Conference Legislative Workshops
“Strengthening and Supporting Our Communities”
Thursday, November 9, 2023
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Hon. Karinés Reyes
Chair
NYS Assembly & Senate
Puerto Rican and Hispanic Task Force

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Message from the Chairperson
Assembly Member Karines Reyes, R.N.
2023 Somos Puerto Rico Conference

I am pleased and honored, as Chair of the New York State Assembly & Senate's Puerto Rican / Hispanic Task Force, to present a report on the Task Force's legislative panels and workshops that took place during the 2023 Somos Puerto Rico Conference, which occurred on Thursday, November 9th.

These panel discussions provided a forum for Task Force members, policy experts, practitioners in fields of interest, and community members to gather and discuss pressing issues impacting Hispanic New Yorkers. The conference contained a ground-breaking 36 panels, which were free and open to the public, covering crucial topics, such as food policy, economic empowerment, worker and environmental justice, social safety nets for immigrant communities and so much more.

The theme of this year's conference is *Strengthening and Supporting Communities*. In the aftermath of devastating hurricanes and failing infrastructure, Puerto Rico continues to embark on monumental efforts to rebuild, re-stabilize and strengthen the island. During the conference, our primary goal is to celebrate unity and harness the power of collective action. We will explore themes such as social and corporate responsibility, economic development, sustainability, and culture. The island is teeming with cultural diversity and remarkable biodiversity, where each community, while unique, forms an indispensable part of the whole.

By coming together, we can pave the way for a better future for all. As part of our commitment, we aim to raise awareness of the various communities across the island. Helps us promote and embrace unity, diversity, and collaboration. Together, we can fortify and uplift communities, creating a resilient and prosperous Puerto Rico and extending support to other Hispanic communities on the island.

The Task Force is a body composed of nearly 30 Assembly Members and State Senators of Latino-descent, along with state legislators that represent districts containing significant Latino populations. We stand united, as a committed voice, and use our collective power to initiate, amplify, and win comprehensive policy achievements that benefit Hispanic New Yorkers. We look to achieve innovative policy changes that can create a blueprint for others states and the federal government to consider and implement, for the benefit of our vital community, across the country.

I would like to express immense gratitude to the innumerable partners who provided assistance with these panel discussions and the development of this report. I thank Somos, Incorporated, who provided the space and venue for these urgent conversations to occur. Additionally, I am thankful for the Hispanic Federation's logistical support with the panel conversations. Finally, I am appreciative of the Hunter College – CUNY's Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO) and Fordham University's Center for Community Engaged Learning for their notetaking and documentation of panel discussions, which was key to the development of this report.

CONCURRENT PANELS

Creative Organizing in our Latino Communities



Chairs: Assemblymember Manny de los Santos and Councilmember Carmen de la Rosa

Panelists: Yelimara Concepción, Crossroads Program Associate, CCCADI; Yazmin Morales-Vincente, Activity Specialist, El Puente-Latino Climate Action Network; María Lizardo, Executive Director, NMIC; Mino Lora, Executive Artistic Director, People's Theatre Project

Abstract: The workshop included panelists working as non-profit executive directors and elected officials serving Latino communities across NY and in PR, who discussed engaging and creative ways of organizing (with the arts and in the digital space) on issues such as immigration, gender violence, and housing. Arts and culture organizations are presented as critical points of entry to social justice causes, since the arts are easy to use as an engagement mechanism. Correspondingly, panelists presented the arts as a medium for providing support and providing space for manifesting community and individual needs. Some panelists highlighted the role of arts-centered non-for-profits as sites of leadership development as well as overall skills-building. But they also stressed the fact that the arts are usually targeted for budget cuts, and advocate against diminishing its power.

Addressing the Mental Health Crisis: Eliminating Barriers to Culturally Competent Care by Strengthening the Workforce in New York, Puerto Rico, and the Diaspora



Chair: Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas

Panelists: Jackie Mondros, Former Dean, SUNY Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare & CUNY Silberman School of Social Work; Dr. Rosa Gil, CEO, Communilife; Monika Estrada Guzmán, Psychotherapist, New York Presbyterian Hospital & Board Member of Latino Social Work Coalition and Scholarship Fund; María Lugo, Senior Director for Health Initiatives, Hispanic Federation

Abstract: The workshop brought together the urgent need to address the mental health crisis in both New York and Puerto Rico while emphasizing the importance of cultivating a culturally competent social work pipeline. Highlighted were the challenges for Latino adolescent, particularly around suicide ideation and attempts; the inadequacies in current mental health delivery; difficulties in recruiting a diverse mental health program workforce. The legislative proposal to eliminate licensure exams after completing education and field placement (A5291) was discussed. Panelists emphasized the importance of including cultural competence in mental health assessment and program development; advocated for federal and state grants and the

elimination of licensing exams and for a more efficient licensing process. Puerto Rico-centered concerns were the brain drain of mental health workers and the need for programs addressing collective trauma in the face of catastrophic natural disasters.

For next steps, panelists discussed the implementation of a more efficient licensing process, including financial incentives for dual MSW programs in Spanish and eliminating licensure exams after completing education and field placement; the restructuring in mental health education, potentially delaying field practice until deprogramming occurs; an interdisciplinary approach in mental health education, taking into account the unique needs of different communities and regions; and efforts to address mental health challenges in Puerto Rico.

Saving Lives in Puerto Rico and New York: Harm Reduction Crosses Oceans



Chair: Senator Nathalia Fernández

Panelists: Anthony Feliciano, VP Advocacy, Housing Works; Charles King, Co-Founder & CEO, Housing Works; Alexandra Bárcenas Salgado, Member, Intercambios Puerto Rico; Debbian Fletcher-Blake, President & CEO, Vocational Instruction Project Community Services Inc.; Max Sepúlveda, Manager of Harm Reduction, Housing Works

Abstract: The workshop discussed the evolving and underlying social, economic, and political conditions that drive health disparities among people living with HIV and people who use drugs, including exploring the challenges fueled by a long history of resistance, in Puerto Rico and throughout the diaspora in NYC. *Harm reductionists* were described as pushing against these simmering forces for generations that are now erupting in a critical moment of change. Panelists discussed harm reduction strategies in addressing alcoholism and substance use disorder, emphasizing a person-centered approach that focuses on clean syringe distribution, housing support, mental health services, and community outreach; following a person-centered approach, considering the whole individual and their unique experiences. Panelists highlighted the use of peer workers with lived experiences as part of the staff for a deeper community understanding. They also acknowledge diverse needs in recovery and the importance of flexibility in intervention strategies.

For next steps, panelists focused on advocacy for a holistic and community-engaged approach to harm reduction, emphasizing the need for tailored support at various levels, and recognizing recovery as not a one-size-fits-all concept. Moreover, panelists asserted advocacy involves fair compensation for healthcare workers providing addiction services as an essential aspect.

Understanding the EPA's Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTACs)



Chair: Assemblymember Amanda Séptimo

Panelists: Peggy Sheppard, Executive Director and Co-Founder, WEACT for Environmental Justice; Kim Gaddy, National Environmental Justice Director, IPI; Dr. Yoganí Govender, Dean of Science & Technology, Inter-American University of Puerto Rico; Albert Huang, Environmental Justice Director, NYU School of Law's Institute for Policy Integrity; Jonathan Castillo Polanco, Green Energy and Critical Services Manager, Hispanic Federation

Abstract: The workshop was aimed at increasing community and stakeholder awareness of the new EPA Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTACs), the services available through them, and the steps needed to participate in the TCTACs, and to receive the technical assistance offered. Panelists discussed the joint effort between WE ACT and InterAmerican University for their new EJ TCTACs to provide training and capacity-building on writing grant proposals, including federal systems such as Grants.gov and SAM.gov and translation and interpretation services for limited English-speaking participants. Panelists provided a reflection on the growth of the environmental justice movement; underscoring challenges faced by vulnerable communities in disaster-prone regions, for instance, rising asthma rates near ports; and the need for improving data collection, bridge historical data gaps, and access to resources. Panelists underscored hub-and-spoke models supporting community-based organizations and highlighted capacity-building for effectively handling federal funds, and collaboration with academic partners, NYU Law School, and Columbia Climate School, emphasizing training and technical assistance. Panelists also remarked on the significance of community input, storytelling, and oral history in grant writing, and gave emphasis on building trust and creating a comfortable space for engagement. They also discussed the challenges faced by vulnerable communities and vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, in disaster-prone regions; and directed the audience's attention to meeting seniors where they are, using text messages, and seeking funding for technology.

For next steps, panelists are setting to implement technical assistance in areas such as grant writing, grants management, policy issues, and engagement with decision-makers; turning to the promotion of websites for additional information, resources, and event registration; continued collaboration with community-based organizations and academic partners; and have an ongoing commitment to inclusivity, community care, and addressing environmental justice issues.

Healthcare Access in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora; Best Practices



Chairs: Assemblymember Steven Raga, Assemblymember Amy Paulin and Assemblymember Edward Gibbs

Panelists: Dr. Maja Castillo, Pediatric Medical Director; Michelle Drayton, Vice President for Health Equity, United Way NYC; Dr. Adam Aponte, Chief Medical Officer, Boriken/East Harlem Council for Human Services Inc.; Sylvia Pong, Senior Director of Nutrition Programs, United Way NYC; Ann Marie Vásquez, Director of Marketing and Outreach, East Harlem Council for Human Services Inc.

Abstract: Panelists shared best practices for addressing health disparities in communities with high rates of disease and limited access to quality health care services, in the context of how Puerto Ricans experience more health disparities and lifestyle risk factors compared to other populations. Specifically, panelists discussed the benefits of training and investing in the community to provide access to healthcare, food and benefits, as well as best practices for filling gaps in poor and low-income communities that have a shortage of primary care providers. Panelists highlighted the role of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) as key institutions in addressing health status, health inequities, and access to care, since FQHCs provide primary preventive care for all regardless of ability to pay or immigration status. The range of services they provide included primary care, prenatal services, women's health, pediatrics, adult medicine, geriatric care, HIV/AIDS care, dental services, and behavioral health services, with specialty care based on population needs. But panelists noted how services are challenged by disparities in funding and access impacting underserved communities disproportionately. Key among these challenges are Medicaid recertification and rate adequacy. Panelists also remarked on the disparities in funding, services, and access between New York and Puerto Rico.

For next steps, panelists called for advocacy for equitable funding and resources for FQHCs, especially addressing disparities in Puerto Rico; for developing strategies to enhance rate adequacy, streamline appointment scheduling, and attract more behavioral healthcare providers; and to expand initiatives focusing on health equity, preventative care, and community-based collaborations. They also called for strengthening collaboration efforts between New York City and Puerto Rico to improve healthcare access and outcomes, and on addressing social determinants of health and contributing to community well-being.

Full Restoration of Voting Rights in NY and What the NY State Legislature Can Learn from Puerto Rico



Chairs: Senator Julia Salazar and Assemblymember Harvey Epstein

Panelists: Angel Solís, Project Coordinator for the Youth Empowerment Program, Alliance of Families for Justice; Edward-Yemi Rosario, Campaign Coordinator, Youth Empowerment Program & Advocacy Unit of Alliance of Families for Justice; and Senator Zellnor Myrie

Abstract: The workshop discussed what the New York State legislature can learn from Puerto Rico to propose and implement a voter restoration bill, in light of continuing felony disenfranchisement in the state. The panel also highlighted the importance of public engagement on this initiative and the strategies to pass a voter rights restoration bill in the NYS legislature. Other jurisdictions in the U.S., such as Puerto Rico, Vermont, and Maine, allow incarcerated people to vote. The reasoning behind this posture is the transformative impact of allowing incarcerated individuals to vote, fostering a sense of belonging and connection to society, shifting the focus from punishment to rehabilitation, with a vision of creating a just society. Panelists outlined the process of amending the constitution, highlighting the need for legislative support, public awareness, and a coordinated campaign, and discussed the challenges in advocating for multiple bills simultaneously and the impact of fear and ignorance on voting rights.

For next steps, panelists encouraged writing to elected officials, urging them to cosponsor the bill and support the campaign; spreading information, signing petitions, and engaging with the campaign's website to increase public awareness; and calling on individuals to be allies in supporting the campaign, dispelling misinformation, while advocating for the restoration of voting rights for incarcerated individuals in New York.

Advancing Public Safety in New York, Puerto Rico, and the Diaspora



Chair: Senator Gustavo Rivera

Panelists: Maria Mari-Narváez, Executive Director, Kilómetro Cero; Rafael A. Torruella, Executive Director, Intercambios Puerto Rico; Serena Martin-Liguori, Executive Director, New Hour for Women & Children; Alana Sivin, NYS Director, Criminal Justice Reform at FWD.us

Abstract: This panel brought together representatives of organizations in New York and Puerto Rico whose missions include building communities through public investments and reducing incarceration. It exchanged strategies that have worked in New York and Puerto Rico, and went on to discuss the next policies being advanced by criminal justice advocates in both places, including sentencing reform, and the decriminalization of substance use. Panelists discussed the impact of austerity measures on the police budget and the challenges faced by families seeking

accountability for police actions in Puerto Rico; issues of health equity and rights of people who use drugs, advocating for bottom-up approaches and addressing economic and political stability; the connection between oppression, colonization, and the incarceration of black and brown individuals, advocating for community resources and harm reduction beyond substance use; and the *unsafety* of keeping people incarcerated, calling for a shift towards addressing root causes, reducing prison populations, and investing in community resources.

For next steps, workshop panelists called for the passage of the Mandatory Minimums Act, Second Look Act, Earned Time Act, as well as parole reforms, to bring positive change in the criminal justice system. They also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive and community-centered approach to public safety, challenging traditional methods like over-policing and incarceration; as well as collaboration among small businesses and organizations to resist gentrification, support vulnerable populations, and ensure community stability. They also stressed the involvement of directly-impacted individuals in policymaking and decision-making processes for effective and equitable solutions.

Multidisciplinary Approach to Strengthening Food Access in Puerto Rico



Chairs: Assemblymember Yudelka Tapia and Assemblymember Catalina Cruz

Panelists: Shana McCormick, Program Director, RAP4Bronx; Father Mike López, All Saints, Ridgewood, NY; Matt Jozwiak, Founder & CEO, Rethink Food; Leslie Gordon, Founder and CEO, Food Bank for New York City; Mari Jo Laborde, Executive Director & CEO,

Banco de Alimentos de Puerto Rico; Phillip Grant, Chief Executive Officer, Hunts Point Produce Market

Abstract: The workshop brought together legislative and nonprofit leaders for a discussion on community needs and policy opportunities to leverage global food markets locally, drive economic growth, promote sustainability, and reinforce community bonds. They highlighted the resource-and-cost-sharing models used by NYC-based hunger relief organizations in forming strategic partnerships to not only meet the needs of their communities, but also amplify their impact beyond their service areas. This panel also explored the challenges and opportunities of expanding this model to Puerto Rico. In highlighting the challenges faced in the districts and service areas, panelists stressed the impact of the pandemic on food insecurity and the high number of undocumented residents, confusion and frustration related to emergency food programs, concerns about reduced federal funds, and the importance of addressing food insecurity as a long-term issue. They also indicated the changing nature of food needs in the community, shifting from serving street homeless populations to a broader community, with increased demand during the pandemic.

For next steps, panelists indicated the need for data collection, collaboration and coordination among organizations; building agricultural infrastructure, such as seed banks and cold storage;

and buttressing distribution networks. They advocated for legislative measures supporting food access and security, emphasizing the importance of sustained funding.

The Impact of Recent U.S. Supreme Court Decisions on Puerto Rico and its Citizens: Overruling the Insular Cases



Chair: Assemblymember Kenny Burgos

Panelists: Sherry Levin Wallach, Immediate Past President, New York State Bar Association; Mirna Martínez, President, Girls Rule the Law; Natalia Gómez-Vélez, State and City Legislative Affairs, CUNY Law School; Adi Martínez-Román, Co-Executive Director, Right to Democracy

Abstract: This workshop featured a comprehensive understanding of the various challenges impacting Puerto Ricans both on the island and on the mainland, such as poverty, post-disaster reconstruction, privatization, and displacement under colonialism and present strategies to address them, in the context of the recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court based on the Insular Cases and Territories Clause of the constitution. Panelists argued that the Insular Cases established the colonial framework that viewed the inhabitants of U.S. territories as inferior races undeserving of equal treatment and constitutional protections that persist to this day. The panelists grappled with steps the United States must take to improve its service provision to Puerto Rico's residents within constraints imposed by the Court cases and constitutional provisions, foremost among them the Supreme Court's unwillingness to revert those precedents. To that end, panelists stressed the need to challenge these precedents through education, coalition-building, litigation, and legislative action.

Empowering Communities Through Language



Chair: Assemblymember Jonathan Rivera

Panelists: April N.M. Baskin, Chair, Erie County Legislator District 2, Denise Miranda, Executive Director, NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs; Jeanette Moy, Commissioner, NYS Office of Language Access; Margarita Larios, Executive Director, NYS Office of Language Access; Maria L. Imperial, Commissioner, NYS Division of Human Rights

Abstract: The workshop presented perspectives and strategies from different New York State government principals, and cultural experts to apply a social justice framework in providing government services to all New Yorkers, using language as a tool of empowerment, considering that New York is home to speakers of over 800 languages, with approximately 5.6 million people speaking a language other than English at home. Panelists discussed the importance of language access in critical areas such as healthcare and education, and they highlighted collaboration between state agencies, contractors, and non-profits. Panelists from government

agencies underscored eliminating discrimination, promoting equal opportunity, and handling discrimination complaints whether based on the use of language other than English or as a result of national origin discrimination. There was an emphasis on hate and bias prevention as well as rapid response teams in instances of discrimination or bias. There is a variety of laws that address language access; customization for different populations remains a challenge. The growing use of AI in language services is seen as a positive tool, though responsible use was emphasized. Technology, such as providing assistive devices for individuals with disabilities, was also presented as a measure to meet the language needs of the population.

For next steps, panelists stressed the need to invest in organizations reflective of diverse communities in upstate New York; increased representation in the civil service workforce; and the professionalization of language services. They also called for collaboration with school districts outside of New York City for accountability and access to language services

Safety Net Hospitals: The Road to Health Equity



Chair: Assemblymember George Álvarez and Senator Zellnor Myrie

Panelists: Víctor M. Pichardo, Vice President for Community and Government affairs, Bronx SBH Health System; Maritere Padilla Rodríguez, Senior Director of Policy & Advocacy for Puerto Rico, Hispanic Federation; Ramón J. Rodríguez, President & CEO, Wycoff Heights Medical Center

Abstract: This workshop discussed how properly funded Safety Nets can move New York State closer to its goal of achieving health equity. Panelists indicated how Safety Net hospitals primarily serve patients who are largely uninsured or rely on Medicaid. They serve millions of New Yorkers, majority people of color, with disproportionate rates of chronic diseases, poor social determinants of health, and significantly worse health outcomes.

Empowering Asylum Seekers through Workforce Development: A Path to Economic Independence



Chair: Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes

Panelists: Yesenia Mata, Executive Director, La Colmena; Diana Caba, VP for Community & Economic Development, Hispanic Federation; Cecilia Cortés Vila, Senior Program Officer, New York Women Foundation; Lorena Kourousias, Executive Director, La Mixteca; Nilbia Coyote, Executive Director, New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE)

Abstract: The panel focused on the way asylum-seekers and other immigrant workers have been incorporated and supported through worker rights centers known as *paradas*, organizations with

a philanthropic perspective that are oftentimes led by women. Given the uncertain nature of these workers' positions in the economy and society, panelists emphasized the need for coordinating efforts with philanthropy in the private sector. Nevertheless, the Excluded Workers Fund and the Unemployment Bridge were presented as examples of empowering mechanisms for immigrant workers and their families. Panelists also emphasized the importance of workforce training and cultural competence. Language barriers and access to cell phones were presented as barriers to reaching asylum seekers. Political involvement is seen as a crucial component in the support of programs to sustain immigrant workers.

For next steps, panelists emphasized the need for advocacy for increased federal action on immigration reform and a pathway to citizenship; ensuring the nonprofit sector receives adequate funding for sustained impact; continue efforts and initiatives, such as the Excluded Workers Fund and Unemployment Bridge; develop and expand programs addressing mental health, education, leadership, and access to resources for immigrant communities; and promote women in leadership roles and work towards economic justice for immigrant communities.

Latinos in the Law: Los Primeros, Pero No Los Últimos



Chair: Assemblymember Catalina Cruz

Panelists: Judge Carmen Velázquez; Miguelina Camilo, Counsel to Speaker Carl E. Heastie, New York State Assembly; Benjamin Santiago Torres, Director of Labor Studies, Unión General De Trabajadores UGT Local 1199 SEIU; Eric González, District Attorney, Brooklyn District Attorney

Abstract: The workshop focused on the various ways the Latino community continues to shape New York's judicial system, highlighting the significant contributions that the Latino community has brought to it. Yet, panelists underscored the underrepresentation still evident in the different dimensions of the legal field, from the limited representation in district attorneys' offices, to disparities in promotions and the emotional toll (e.g., impostor syndrome) and financial sacrifice many Latinos in or contemplating to join the legal profession face. In order to address that underrepresentation, panelists called for greater efforts at diversity and inclusion within the legal profession as well as formal or informal mentorship. Those Latinos in prominent positions and positions of influence were called to inspire and encourage younger generations to pursue careers in the law. Another salient issue discussed was the need for addressing issues of criminal records that fetter their opportunities for personal and community improvement as a result of a criminal record.

For next steps, panelists advocated for the Clean Slate initiative; continued advocacy for diversity and inclusion within the legal profession; and the promotion of mentorship opportunities.

Seeds of Change: Navigating New York's Cannabis Landscape - Challenges, Hopes for Reparations and the Road Ahead



Chair: Assemblymember Michelle Solages

Panelists: Antonio Kaelan Castetter, Managing Director, Castetter Cannabis Group; Pilar De Jesús, Advocacy Coordinator, Takeroot Justice; Kavita Pawria-Sánchez, CEO, Cannabronx; Dr. Junella Chin, Vice Chair, Cannabis Advisory Board for NYS Office of Cannabis Management; Dr. Troy Easterling, Senior VP for Population & Community Health & Chief Strategic & Innovation, One Brooklyn Health; Dasheeda Dawson, Founding Director, Cannabis NYC; Senator Jeremy Cooney, NYS Senate

Abstract: This workshop engaged the evolving landscape in New York State as a result of the passage of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act which resulted in over 500 licensed operators and dispensaries across the state, but has offered communities to opt out over concerns about public health and safety. Panelists emphasized the concept of reparations (in the form of access to capital, land and resources) in cannabis legalization as an issue of social justice and public health, given the historical harms that enforcement against cannabis represented for communities and the need for healing those communities. Panelists called for the discretionary allocation of the multi-billion dollar budget generated by the cannabis industry for the benefit of local communities, while engaging local communities to address issues of concern to them and ensure equitable resource distribution. They also discussed the potential of social and economic progress, including empowering communities and individuals through cooperative models with the development of the cannabis industry. They further emphasized related subjects such as the potency tax, marketing regulations and the impact on different communities, as well as the need to support farmers and address the challenges litigation involving dispensary operators and financial support for operators from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Worker Power Knows No Bounds: A Look at Workforce Development & the Labor Movement in Puerto Rico



Chair: Senator Jessica Ramos

Panelists: Therese Daly, Deputy Director, NYATEP; Debbie Román, Managing Director, PER SCHOLAS; Rosemary Ávila, Executive Director, CNY Works Onondaga County Workforce Development Board & Career Center, Neftalí Nieves, Business Agent, IATSE Local 494 in Puerto Rico; Anna Nowlan, Business Representative, International Cinematographers Guild, IATSE Local 600; Michele Pérez, Assistant Deputy Secretary Office of Field Policy & Management, US Department of Housing & Urban Development

Abstract: The panel broached the issues of workforce development and labor organizing in Puerto Rico, with the background of the historical contributions of Puerto Rican labor in New York and the learnings and insights that New York can share. Panelists discussed strategies for

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upskilling in Puerto Rico to promote job creation and economic development with an emphasis on research, education, and training to advance collective bargaining and union rights. Panelists highlighted the unique conditions in Puerto Rico given its vulnerability to natural disasters, which create challenges and opportunities: the exploration of workforce development as a component of resilience planning, and the importance of improving digital access for job seekers. Panelists also stressed the role of apprenticeships to enhance job opportunities and skill development, as well as the need for supportive services such as childcare and transportation to facilitate job participation. Panelists also emphasized the overall background conditions in Puerto Rico that affect workforce development, such as the need for infrastructural support for industries overall and, for instance, in the entertainment industry.

In Conversation: Addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness in NY and Puerto Rico



Chair: Assemblymember Tony Simone

Panelists: Nadia Swanson, Director of Technical Assistance & Advocacy, The Ali Forney Center; Alexander Roque, President & Executive Director, The Ali Forney Center; Marcos Santana, Trabajador Social y Fundador, Red Por Los Derechos de La Niñez y Juventud; Perla Li, Manager, Casa Ramón

Abstract: The workshop was organized with the goal of raising awareness about the needs of LGBTQ+ homeless youth in Puerto Rico, to advocate for culturally responsive government support in New York and Puerto Rico. Panelists described the challenges LGBTQ+ homeless youth, not just limited to housing but supportive housing as well that address substance abuse and survival sex work. Youth advocacy, in the form of the Youth Advocacy Board, was identified as being instrumental in influencing policy changes, such as the success in allowing minors to consent to their medical care. Representation, visibility and support for LGBTQ organizations also identified as being important components for effectively addressing LGBTQ+ homeless youth needs. Panelists also underscored the need for culturally responsive government services and active attention of elected officials to represent the youth.

For next steps, panelists advocate for increased representation and support for LGBTQ organizations, legal recognition of emotional abuse resulting from homophobia and transphobia, and legislation recognizing homophobia and transphobia as child abuse. They also called for developing more housing support for LGBTQ individuals aged 21 to 24 and continuing to address substance use disorders through comprehensive, harm reduction-based programs.

Power in Numbers: How Asian-Latino Civic Solidarity can positively impact New York State



Chair: Assemblymember Ron Kim and Assemblymember Steven Raga

Panelists: Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director, Asian American Federation; Ron Kim, Assemblymember, NYS Assembly; Steven Raga, Assemblymember, NYS Assembly; John Rivera, NYS Assembly; Murad Awawdeh, Executive Director, New York Immigration Coalition

Abstract: The workshop provided a space for attendees to discuss Asian-Latino civic solidarity and share how those communities can work together in the run-up to the 2024 and 2025 election cycles. Panelists discussed common barriers faced by Asian and Hispanic communities and how to engage them with tactics centered around cultural competency and the importance of building more profound and long-lasting relationships between diverse organizations. In terms of challenges, panelists discussed barriers to voting stemming from lack of uniformity in early voting access, issues of language accessibility and lack of user-friendly technologies in facilitating voting. Panelists mentioned the need to promote grassroots efforts to encourage participation and increase representation, by focusing on common issues for immigrant communities, such as housing and language justice, and intentional community organizing.

Sovereign Debt and Immigration: How Wall Street Fuels the Migrant Crisis and How New York can Take Action



Chair: Senator Gustavo Rivera

Panelists: Alice Nascimento, Campaigns Director, New York Communities for Change; Loidymar Duprey, Filmmaker & Community Activist; Manuel Natal, Former member of the 29th House of Representatives of Puerto Rico

Abstract: The panel discussed ways New York can take action regarding the operations of Wall Street-based hedge funds that purchased distressed sovereign bonds and then sue those countries for repayment in New York courts. Panelists argue that these hedge funds target mostly countries in African and Latin America with the direct results of pushing economic migrants from these countries to the U.S. One proposal would bring basic bankruptcy protections to countries with bonds governed by New York State law to protect against predatory practices. Panelists presented examples from Brazil and Puerto Rico, describing the consequences of austerity measures, including mass exodus, school closures, economic challenges, gentrification, and land sales in Vieques.

Advancing an Age-Inclusive NYC Through Intergenerational Community-Building



Chair: Senator Cordell Cleare

Panelists: Lorraines Cortés-Vázquez, Commissioner, Department of the Aging; Wilfred Labiosa, CEO, Waves Ahead Corp; Jeremy Kaplan, Board Member, NYC Department of the Aging & Strategy & Priority Committee of the Human Services Council of NY

Abstract: Panelists in this workshop discussed intergenerational programming by bringing different age groups together for youth and older adults to see the commonality in their successes and struggles. Given the rate at which New York City is growing older—by 2040, the number of people aged 65 and older is expected to jump more than 40 percent to 1.4 million—intergenerational community-building was described as key to strengthening communities. Panelists described the economics of community care and its cost-effectiveness, emphasizing partnerships and cultural appropriateness. An example provided was the training of teenagers as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) with an expanded budget for in-home services increasing by \$9.3 million. Panelists called for creative collaborations and the need for flexibility in funding for multigenerational programming. Panelists called for fair funding for New York City’s aging population.

Cybersecurity and Emerging Technologies: Understanding the Best Ways for Underserved Communities to Stay Safe in the Digital Space



Chair: Assemblymember John Zaccaro

Panelists: Sherry Levin Wallach, Deputy Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Westchester County; Marc Beckam, CEO, DMA United; Pablo Segarra, Founder, SideHustleLaw; Eliseo Roques Arroyo, Manager Partner, Edge Legal; Fernando Brinn, CEO/President, The Brinn Group; Eduardo Laguerre, Founder & President, BOT of the Charter School of Educational Excellence; Johanns Quiroz, Sr.

Technical Sales, Horizon3.ai; Tyler Wendland, Director of Business Development, Cyber Security Cloud

Abstract: The panel discussed the underrepresentation of Latinx in Web3 companies and the overall evolution in digital technology including artificial intelligence and blockchain technology as well as the ways in which this evolving technology can use this technology to bolster and better serve their communities. Panelists presented how these emerging technologies were transforming law, business and education; but there were challenges to their ethical use, for instance, in the biases evident from the sources of learning for these technologies, the inadequate protection of public and personal data, and “deep fakes”. On the positive side, panelists underscored the opportunities for cost reduction, behavioral prediction and efficiency improvement; the opportunity for cybersecurity by mimicking in anticipation of real attacks.

They similarly stressed the importance of guidelines and proactive participation in shaping regulations.

For next steps, panelists called for on-going conversations related to AI, Blockchain, cybersecurity, and their implications; the importance of educating communities about the ethical use of technologies; and the importance of having people from diverse backgrounds involved in AI algorithm development. Panelists were open to exploring legislation addressing AI bias and discrimination; and called for collaboration, participation in regulatory discussions, and having a proactive voice in shaping regulations.

Trauma in Communities: Impact & Strategies for Addressing Mental Health



Chair: Assemblymember Yudelka Tapia

Panelists: Yvette Bairan, CEO, Astor Services; Sarai Manuel, Bronx Administrator & Bronx Prevention Program Director, Astor Services; Dianne Morales, Founder & CEO, StillRising, LLC; Mike Spano, Mayor of Yonkers; Verónica Colón Rosario, Executive Director, Fundación de Mujeres en Puerto Rico; Anderson Torres, President & CEO, RAIN Total Care, Board for Hogar Cataleya-Puerto Rico HOGAR; Dr. María Trusda, Founder & CEO, Yo Digo Más Movement, Forme Medical Center & Urgent Care

Abstract: Panelists in this workshop discussed how addressing the impact of trauma in our communities requires a holistic approach that combines psychological support, social intervention, economic recovery programs, and efforts to build community connections; and they indicated how an Act to Amend the Mental Hygiene Law in Relation to the Development of a Public Anti Stigma Mental Health Education Program (A07406), has the potential to connect Puerto Rican and other Latinx/e New Yorkers to culturally and linguistically competent mental health services. Panelists discussed specifically the impact of adverse childhood experiences, sexual abuse, the impact of disasters on older adults and gender-based violence, and training for police officers to handle mental health issues. Panelists called for collaboration with legislators for sustainable and equitable systems; for creating safe spaces, trauma recovery centers, and trauma informed systems; and for addressing the limitations on care created by insurance and scant health care coverage.

For next steps, panelists advocated for more community-led support systems, greater mental health accessibility, awareness and education, and collaboration with the diaspora, public and private sectors to secure funding and resources for mental health programs, especially for vulnerable populations. Panelists also called for policy changes that address the specific needs of survivors of trauma, including sexual abuse and gender-based violence, towards creating safe spaces for healing after trauma, acknowledging the importance of a supportive environment; and for integrating mental health considerations into climate resilience strategies, recognizing the impact of climate disasters on mental health and gender-based violence.

Expanding the Hispanic and Latino Community Presence in the Tech Industry and Increasing Digital Literacy & Citizenry for All



Chairs: Assemblymember Edward Gibbs and Assemblymember Latrice Walker

Panelists: Councilmember Jennifer Gutiérrez, NYC Council; Anthony Riddle, Senior VP, Community Media BRIC; Tomás Uribe, Co-Founder & CEO, Mavity; Leslie J Borell, Founder & CEO, Splyt; Larry Gallegos and Luis Barrera

Abstract: Panelists set to address the underrepresentation of minorities and Hispanics in the tech industry, with a low percentage of black and Latino people in the overall tech world and an even smaller percentage that are in executive positions. Panelists discussed ways to bring Latinos into tech professions and build new career pathways for them in and outside of New York. They emphasized the value of diversity and its role in motivation and creative solutions. Panelists also underscored the importance of developing digital literacy and tech skills, through online resources and coding academies; pointing to the role of colleges and universities in roadmapping entrepreneurship and technology education; and the need to break down barriers to entry for young entrepreneurs by cultivating entrepreneurship through mentorship, role models, and programs.

Building Unity and Equity in Education: New York's Vision for the Future



Chairs: Senator Nathalia Fernández and Assemblymember Phil Ramos

Panelists: María Fernández, Deputy Secretary of Education, Office of Governor Hochul; John B. King Jr, Chancellor, SUNY; Dr. Guillermo Linares, President, Higher Education Services Corporation; Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor, CUNY

Abstract: The panelists discussed the current landscape in higher education for Puerto Rican and other Latino students in New York, 30% of which are Hispanic; the role of public universities, particularly CUNY in educating Latinos students and as a vehicle of social mobility; the challenges that new students, particularly immigrants, face and pose, addressing them through student support, such as improve literacy and language programs. Panelists also described some of the major challenges the system faces in addressing the needs of Latino students, such as their financial readiness and the complexity of the FAFSA process, and the recent US Supreme Court decision on affirmative action in higher education, and the challenges faced by adult learners. Panelists also discussed how a shift to early college programs have improved the chances of successfully completing a college degree; how career services, internships, and apprenticeships have enhanced the students' transition from education to employment.

For next steps, panelists emphasized accountability for progress and delivery of better outcomes in education; called for sustained interagency collaboration, especially in early education, to promote better outcomes; and to institute reforms to address challenges in the transfer system and save costs for students' careers. They also seek to address challenges faced by adult learners through flexible schedules, financial aid, and support services like childcare; improve career services, internships, and apprenticeships to enhance the transition from education to employment; and support early college programs systematically by addressing funding challenges and promoting equity.

The Latinas Agenda: Economic Empowerment of Latinas - Where is My Seat at the Table?



Chair: Assemblymember Amanda Séptimo

Panelists: Paola Martínez, Director of Strategic Programs and Special Initiatives, Catholic Charities; María Lizardo, Executive Director, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)

Abstract: The panel focused on the marginality of Latinas in the economy and on how to overcome that situation through self-reliance and organizing. Panelists mentioned how Hispanic women made 52 cents for every dollar a white man makes, which is why they are pushing for the Just Pay Campaign. Panelists also indicated how Latinas have the highest workforce participation rate of any group, and how they are showing a growing number of educational degrees than in the past, and how they contribute \$3.2 trillion to the country's GDP. They pointed out further that Latinas not only make less than non-Hispanic white men, but often do not prepare for unforeseen circumstances, and therefore do not leave trust accounts or wills for their children. Panelists emphasized the need to create a direct space, be connectors in order to support each other.

Planeando Para Nosotros: Building A Future for All of Us



Chair: Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes

Panelists: Wanda Salaman, Executive Director, Mothers on the Move; Dariella Rodríguez, Community Development Director, The Point CDC; Karla Cruz, Legislative Director, Local 79/LIUNA; Dolly Santiago Adorno, CoFounder, Parceleras Afrocaribeñas/Mulowayi Nono; Glenny Álvarez Trinidad, Project Director, Parceleras Afrocaribeñas

Abstract: The panelists discussed the significance of processes in stabilizing neighborhoods and ensuring the long-term viability of communities through Community participatory planning, highlighting the benefits, challenges, and a set of models for effective community participatory planning. Panelists mentioned challenges to community planning stemming from external

pressures such as investment, development, displacement, and gentrification, and presented community engagement and inclusivity in decision-making processes as dampeners to those pressures. They emphasized community empowerment by way of participatory planning since issues such as air quality, jobs, and housing conditions arise from that participatory involvement, and the uplifting role participatory planning may have on youth leadership development.

For next steps, panelists stressed the need for ongoing initiatives to empower communities through inclusive and collaborative participatory planning approaches and Continued efforts to address challenges, emphasizing political education, civic engagement, and unlearning oppressive systems. They also called for strategies to enhance trust-building throughout the participatory planning process, and further development and implementation of community resilience plans within the visitor economy context.

Juntos, Advancing Equity and Excellence: Leveraging Biden’s Administration and Resources to Drive Latino Success



Chair: Assemblymember Kenny Burgos

Panelists: Dr. Havidán Rodríguez, President, University at Albany; Melody González, Executive Director, White House Hispanic Initiative; Chris Soto, Senior Advisor, U.S Secretary of Education; Dr. Luis A. Ferrao Delgado, President, University of Puerto Rico, System

Abstract: The workshop brought members of the Biden-Harris Administration, the President's Advisory Commission, and the President of the University of Puerto Rico System (UPR), who discussed key federal educational equity and workforce development efforts and participate in an active discussion on how to better advance equity for Latina/o students, faculty, staff, and families. They discussed the unique challenges and opportunities in higher education in Puerto Rico and highlighted how the work of the commission impacts Latinos/as in both Puerto Rico and the U.S.; for instance, disparities in graduation rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students. To address this issue and to promote greater participation of Latino students in higher education, panelists suggested increased Hispanic representation in higher education leadership, increase teacher diversity, loan cancellations and income-driven repayment plans. Puerto Rico-specific issues highlighted by panelists centered around deteriorating infrastructure of public schools and delayed access to federal funds, and the need to decentralize administrative decision-making as a solution to improve management and direct federal funds to schools, and merit-based selections for superintendents, directors, and school principals divorced from partisan political considerations.

For next steps, panelists called for establishing Puerto Rico's first local school district outside the central office, encouraging the public university to become a Hispanic serving institution (HSI), and encouraging successful models like Excelencia in Education for replication

Access to Justice



Chair: Assemblymember David Weprin

Panelists: Ester Aronova, Managing Partner, Aronova & Associates; Michael Villeck, Partner, The Sanders Firm; Douglas H. Sanders, Senior Partner Milberg, Coleman, Bryson Firm; Alejandro García Padilla, Former Governor of Puerto Rico; Paul Napoli, Manager Partner, Napoli & Shkolnik PLLC; Ivelise Fernández, Executive Director, Trial Lawyers of Puerto Rico

Abstract: Panelists discussed how shortcomings in Puerto Rico’s legal system short change victims who turn to the legal system for recourse. Panelists also called for enhancement for access to the legal process in Puerto Rico. They framed the discussion of access to the legal system in Puerto Rico to the global issue of justice accessibility. Using examples from personal injury cases and workers’ compensation, they zeroed in on the role of law firms in representing individuals against big corporations and the challenges in gaining access to justice in different countries. For Puerto Rico, panelists noted inadequate insurance, compensation issues, lack of litigation funding, and absence of jury trials in state courts. They called for changes in laws and regulations to ensure fair and just compensation for personal injury victims in Puerto Rico, increase limits and encourages major insurance companies to provide coverage in the region, address challenges in determining damages and providing civil legal aid in Puerto Rico, and propose and support legislative changes to enhance access to justice, especially in cases involving child victims of sexual abuse.

A New York Case Study: Community-Based Solutions to Energy Affordability, Reliable Access, and Efficiency



Chair: Senator Cordell Cleare

Panelists: Briana Carbajal, State Legislative Manager, WE ACT for Environmental Justice; Eliza Klein, Clean Energy Program Manager, WE ACT for Environmental Justice—New York Policy Team; Jonathan Castillo Polanco, Green Energy & Critical Services Manager, Hispanic Federation

Abstract: The workshop shared insights on transitioning from profit-driven private energy systems to community-rooted, democratic alternatives and will emphasize debt restructuring plans that promote resilience and affordability. Panelists presented as an example a first-of-its-kind Clean Energy Hub in Manhattan to aid residents and small businesses in accessing affordable energy upgrades and green jobs, based on the Build Public Renewables Act (BPR), which empowers the New York Power Authority to quickly and affordably develop renewables. Panelists also discussed the importance of energy hubs in Puerto Rico for emergency access to energy; the challenges faced by low-income New Yorkers, particularly in communities of color and how high energy costs burden them; the need for funding to address climate-related issues.

For next steps, panelists called for legislative efforts to protect communities from displacement and ensure a fair transition to cleaner energy; prioritization of needs for low-income individuals, elders, children, people of color, women, and immigrants; increase funding for education and programs to encourage participation from underrepresented communities; and the need for a gap fund to address existing housing issues and make buildings electrification-ready.

Dominican Women in Puerto Rico: New Insights



Chair: Assemblymember Yudelka Tapia

Panelists: Dr. Ramona Hernández, Director, CUNY Dominican Studies Institute; Romelinda Grullón Miguel, Executive Director, Center for Dominican Women in Puerto Rico; Dr. Pierre Losson, Associate Director, CUNY Dominican Studies Institute

Abstract: The workshop discussed the findings of recent publications on Dominican women in Puerto Rico and looks at initiatives that can improve their living conditions and access to social services and citizenship. The panelists emphasized the role of research and data in understanding the conditions of Dominican women in Puerto Rico, pointing to the challenges posed by the simultaneous decrease in the Dominican population in Puerto Rico with the increased in the proportion of Dominican women in the population segment, particularly related to alarming poverty rates among Dominican children and youth among households headed by women, while Dominican women show a high labor force participation rate. Panelists noted income disparity between Dominican and Puerto Rican women, with a focus on education as a contributing factor.

For next steps, panelists advocated for comprehensive initiatives addressing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for immigrants, with a focus on human rights; funding, particularly for the Dominican Studies Institute, and collaboration with consuls and other organizations to address the identified challenges; and recognition of the rights and needs of immigrants, with a commitment to supporting initiatives promoting social and economic justice within the immigrant community.

Preserving Hip-Hop's Legacy: A 50-Year Journey



Chair: Senator Zellnor Myrie

Panelists: Wes Jackson, President, BRIC Arts Media; Angel Hernández, Bronx Borough Historian; Melissa Libran, President/CEO, Windows of Hip Hop

Abstract: The workshop explored the development of Hip-Hop as a genre and the culture surrounding it, including its evolution in Puerto Rico, while introducing "BRIC Hip-Hop" as a platform for future growth and engagement. Panelists discussed Four key elements of hip-hop culture: (1) Marginalized Representation, (2) Cultural and Political Power,

(3) Roots and Universal Appeal, and (4) Combat in Hip-Hop. Panelists mentioned the challenges of obtaining rap music in the '90s, in contrast to the positive impact of hip hop as a global institution. They also discussed hip hop's role in economic development, education initiatives, and the creation of positive content, while acknowledging negative aspects in hip hop. Panelists also discussed Puerto Rico's historical contribution to hip hop and the erasure of women and Latinos in hip hop history.

For next steps, panelists called for continuing efforts to preserve hip hop history and landmarks; engage the next generation through educational opportunities; and appreciate the storytelling role in preserving and sharing hip hop history.

Wage Theft in NY and Puerto Rico: Stealing from More Than Workers



Chairs: Assemblymember Catalina Cruz and Senator Nathalia Fernández

Panelists: Kelvin Ekins, Political Director, New York City Council of Carpenters; Letitia James, New York State Attorney General, Office of the New York State Attorney General; Hildalyn Colón Hernández, Deputy Director, New Immigrant Empowerment (NICE)

Abstract: The workshop examined wage theft as a crime against workers and communities in New York and Puerto Rico and the vulnerability Latino workers face due to their high concentration in low-wage service occupations. The New York Attorney General stressed the legal and moral obligation for fair pay and laid out the magnitude of the problem in New York State, revealing how nearly \$1 billion in annual wages were withheld, according to a 2017 report, and provided an overview of various forms of wage theft and recent successes in recovering unlawfully withheld wages. In Puerto Rico, workers most vulnerable to wage theft were also located in the service industry, according to the panelists, with the added burden of calls for eliminating the minimum wage in the territory. Panelists underscored the need for educating workers, especially immigrants. There was discussion on union perspectives and the benefits of collective bargaining in combating wage theft. There was discussion of advocacy for leveraging government investments to enforce prevailing wage standards.

For next steps, panelists called for continued advocacy for legislative measures to combat wage theft; provide additional resources and support for the Department of Labor to address complaints; monitor and engage with elected officials to prioritize wage theft issues in the upcoming budget process; and collaborate among different offices to streamline procedures and make the claims process more accessible for workers.

Empowering Public Housing Residents: Unlocking the Transformative Power of HUD Section 3



Chair: Assemblymember Amanda Séptimo

Panelists: Adolfo Carrión Jr., Commissioner, Housing Preservation and Development; Roberto Pérez Santoni, Puerto Rico Public Housing Advocate; William Rodríguez-Rodríguez, Secretary of Housing for Puerto Rico; Michele Pérez, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Field Policy and Management, Housing and Urban Development Headquarters, DC; Manny Martínez, Council President, South Jamaica Houses Resident Association; Sergio Paneque, Chief Procurement Officer, NYC Housing Authority

Abstract: Panelists in this workshop discussed how Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 can promote local economic growth and support marginalized communities, in particular for its potential for economic development, MWBE integration, and equal opportunity. Panelists also advocated for a model Section 3 pilot program that includes public engagement, recruitment, implementation, monitoring and enforcement. They stressed transparency and accountability in Section 3 implementation, particularly at the front end of projects, and engaging with communities to ensure awareness of opportunities. HUD representatives emphasized its commitment to addressing discriminatory practices, while other panelists highlighted the importance of residents understanding their rights, historical context, and the earned nature of Section 3. Panelists also mentioned how discrimination can also be addressed with the proper implementation of project labor agreements affecting access for local residents and businesses. In order to address the challenge of finding qualified Section 3 firms and workers, panelists brought up the need for an effective database and collaboration with universities to identify qualified workers.

For next steps, panelists called for the continuation and expansion of efforts in education, training, and culture change to enhance understanding and compliance with Section 3; simplifying language and branding for better public comprehension; pursue collaboration with other agencies to maximize resources and opportunities for Section 3 businesses and workers; develop and implement an equity action plan involving various agencies and stakeholders to address challenges and enhance the effectiveness of Section 3 programs.

Addressing Challenges; Bridging Divides — Centro and the Study of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican Diaspora



Chair: Senator Mónica Martínez

Panelists: Damayra Figueroa, Research Coordinator, Center for Puerto Rican Studies; Carlos Vargas-Ramos, Director of Public Policy, Center for Puerto Rican Studies; Cristel Justino Díaz, Director of Research Programs, Center for Puerto Rican Studies; Efrén Rivera Ramos, Professor, University of Puerto Rico School of Law, Ana Teresa Toro, Independent Journalist

Abstract: The workshop panelists described select challenges that affect the Puerto Rican population in Puerto Rico and in the United States (e.g. poverty, post-disaster reconstruction, privatization, and displacement under colonialism) and presented some strategies to overcome divisions in fields of research and study that become obstacles to providing policy solutions to those salient challenges (e.g. policy reports, dashboards, interdisciplinary study groups, public programming, and availability of research resources). Panelists zeroed in on two distinct issues affecting Puerto Ricans, their pervasive poverty in the U.S. and the underrepresentation in municipal employment in New York City and throughout New York State. Panelists presented evidence on how more than one-third of the Puerto Rican population live in persistently high poverty counties across the U.S. They also showed how underrepresentation in municipal employment was not uniform, but was starker in positions with higher decision-making power and higher earnings. Panelists and members of the audience emphasized collaboration with CUNY for outreach, encouraging Latino students to take civil service exams, and creating awareness about government job benefits.

For next steps, panelists presented collaborative efforts between research institutions, like Centro, and policymakers to address persistent poverty and underrepresentation; implement proactive measures in municipal employment to promote equity and skill development; continue data collection and research to better understand the challenges faced by specific population groups in chronic poverty; and promote initiatives to diversify government jobs, promote middle management positions, and engage with educational institutions for outreach.

Growing a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce in the Clean Energy Economy: Labor Led Initiatives



Chairs: Assemblymember Latoya Joyner and Senator Jessica Ramos

Panelists: Lara Skinner, Executive Director, Climate Jobs Institute; Santos Rodríguez, Director of Community Affairs & Strategic Initiatives, Trades Council of Greater New York; Davon Lomax, Political Director, District Council 9 and Allied Trades; Amy Desjardins, Executive Director, Workforce Development Institute;

Melissa Shetler, Senior Training and Education Associate, ClimateJobs Institute, Cornell ILR

Abstract: The workshop discussed best practices, challenges, and opportunities developing the training infrastructure, wraparound services, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, and education and outreach efforts needed to build a robust clean energy economy in the context of opportunities provided by Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and CHIPS. Panelists mentioned these federal initiatives provide unprecedented opportunities to expand the workforce and grow good-paying jobs. Panelists mentioned equitable pathways for jobs such as pre-apprenticeship programs to provide access for individuals from underserved communities. They also addressed the building trades council's commitment to diversity by engaging individuals seeking a second chance, including justice-involved individuals. Other subjects broached by the panelists included the need for training to keep pace with technological

advances and the changes that take place in labor standards that affect fair compensation and protection for workers. Panelists also emphasized the need to educate communities about solar energy in order to promote associated industries as sources of employment and business development.

For next steps, panelists proposed continued efforts to connect trade unions with marginalized communities, focusing on high school curriculum development and initiatives supporting justice-involved individuals; develop and expand community plans for reducing asthma rates, promoting renewable energy, and addressing wage disparities through initiatives like worker cooperatives; and support and promote educational initiatives about clean energy, especially within minority communities, with an emphasis on the role of unions.

Bridging the Gap: Community Schools and Economic Development through Career Technical Education, College-to-Career Pathways, and DEI in Strengthening & Supporting Communities



Chairs: Assemblymember Kenny Burgos and Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas

Panelists: Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers; Michael Mulgrew, President, United Federation of Teachers; Rita Joseph, Councilmember & Chair, Education Committee, NYC Council; Michael Kohlhagen, President & CEO,

Center for Educational Innovation; Yanira Raíces Vega, Secretary, Puerto Rico Education; Quamid Francis, Executive Director, City Year New York

Abstract: Panelists discussed Community Schools as a driving force in fostering unity and equity in education, with an emphasis on strategies for strengthening wraparound services, exposing students to diverse career pathways, and preparing them for the future job market, with a focus on New York City and Puerto Rico's unique experiences. Panelists provided a history of community schools and laid out their importance, centered on parental and educator involvement and the gradual development of services within community schools. Panelists hailed the positive outcomes of community schools, such as increased graduation rates, improved test scores, and positive effects on students' social and emotional well-being, emphasizing the role of social and emotional learning, mental health support, and partnerships with community organizations in supporting those outcomes. Panelists also discussed challenges and rising needs stemming from immigration, housing, and public safety.

For next steps, panelists called for a specific \$100 million set aside for new community schools in the State of New York; strengthen partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and local government entities to expand the range of services offered by community schools; and define clear responsibilities and expectations for community school directors, considering ongoing changes in community needs and educational landscapes.

Regulating Artificial Intelligence: Fostering Fairness & Promoting an Equitable Future



Chair: Senator Kristen González

Panelists: Assemblymember Alex Bores, NYS Assembly; Mark Levine, Manhattan Brough President; Representative Yvette Clark, United States House of Representatives; Ellie Nieves, VP & Assistant General Counsel, The Guardian Life Insurance Company; Michael Blake, CEO, Atlas Strategies

Abstract: The workshop addressed positive and dire effects of artificial intelligence (AI). Panelists mentioned how AI has the potential to speed up processes (e.g., processing paperwork) but its willy-nilly deployment can either aid or threaten discriminated communities. Panelists stressed the need to become acquainted with AI, as understanding how it works contributes to knowing how to deploy safely. Panelists distinguished between strong AI and weak AI, with the former a more advanced version that in addition to knowing who the interlocutors are and what they are saying, know how to respond. They pointed to the need to question who designs the AI systems, since they are the ones who introduce biases into the systems that are regurgitated by AI. Panelists also highlighted the need for people to understand that the content that goes into AI is valuable but it stems from people who give it freely. Sources of concern are the shortcuts companies are taking in order to get products to market; how, for instance, the NYPD does not track the basics of AI; and how the U.S. is lagging behind the European Union in creating strict restrictions in order to protect individuals' privacy. Panelists also stressed the need for collaboration between government, academics and industry leaders for effective management of AI. A critical concern was the education of young people in critical thinking, media/digital literacy and ethics and data privacy.

CONCLUSION

The SOMOS 2023 Fall conference in Puerto Rico gathered over two thousand people who attended a wide variety of workshops spanning subject matters of intense interest and mobilization for Hispanics in the state of New York, and with a special focus on Puerto Rico. The thirty-six panels touched upon issues of general welfare, public safety and violence prevention, immigration, housing, education, technology, inter-Latino diversity, inter-minority relations, economic opportunity and wealth creation. These panels, which included more than one hundred and fifty speakers, represent some of the leading issues advocated for by Latino activists, researched on by scholars, and attended to by elected officials and other government officials. These issues reflect the body of politically relevant matters requiring the attention of the New York State Legislature. Some of the workshops were simply convened to provide information and raise awareness of different problems affecting Hispanic New Yorkers. Other workshops sought not simply to inform, but to mobilize and organize into legislative action in order to translate recommended solutions into public policies that may attend to the problems identified. These workshops convened at this conference represent a salient aspect of the involvement of Latinos in the public decision-making process in the state.

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