



Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Advocating for the Interests of Latinos across the Commonwealth

**2009
Report**

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Report prepared by members of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Commonwealth of Virginia

2009



Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Advocating for the Interests of Latinos across the Commonwealth



September 25, 2009

Governor Timothy M. Kaine
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Honorable Governor Kaine:

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board is honored to present to you our final report regarding our 2009 activities. We thank you for your constant commitment to the Latino community and for your continued unwavering support.

In 2009, our mission focused on facilitating a series of town hall meetings in four regions of the state. We sought to communicate with the Latino communities of Virginia in order to present you with the salient issues affecting Latinos throughout the Commonwealth.

Continuing the mission that started in 2005 with the establishment of the Virginia Latino Advisory Commission, we have served as a two-way conduit to communicate between the Latino community and the Governor. We have prepared a report that includes the following: 1) an overview of the town hall meetings; 2) the salient issues and recommendations from each meeting; and 3) the final aggregated recommendations that we as a Board endorse based on the public recommendations at the four town hall meetings.

As members of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, we are pleased to have served under your leadership and would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for your support of our community in numerous venues. We also appreciate your openness and commitment, as well as the resources and hard work you have dedicated to our causes. We look forward to continuing your legacy through VLAB and in our communities throughout the Commonwealth. We wish you all the best as you continue in your new endeavors, and we feel sure that you will continue to advocate for the Latino community.

Respectfully,

Omar Rashid, Chair
The Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Table of Contents

VLAB Members	2
Contact Information	3
Introductory Letter to Governor Kaine	4
Table of Contents	5
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	8
<i>Overview</i>	8
<i>Authority</i>	8
Meetings	10
<i>Board Meetings</i>	10
<i>Town Hall Meetings</i>	10
<i>Committee Members</i>	12
Town Hall Meetings Report	12
<i>Demographics</i>	13
<i>Successful Town Hall Strategies</i>	14
<i>Town Hall Snapshots</i>	14
<i>Northern Virginia</i>	14
<i>Roanoke</i>	14
<i>Eastern Shore</i>	16
<i>Charlottesville</i>	17
<i>Shenandoah Valley/Winchester</i>	18
<i>Richmond</i>	19
Successful Strategies for Town Hall Meetings	19
Final Recommendations to the Governor	20
Conclusions	22
References/Sources	22

Executive Summary

According to statistical data published by the Pew Hispanic Center, the 2007 Hispanic¹ population was 45,378,596, comprising 15% of the U.S. population. This exponential growth has an impact on every aspect of society, including public safety, health and human services, and education. As an example of this impact, between 1990 and 2006, the number of Hispanic students in U.S. public schools doubled to make up 60% of the total growth in public school students. The prediction is that by 2050, school-age Hispanic children will outnumber school-age non-Hispanic Anglo children (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008).

These population changes affect the Commonwealth of Virginia directly, with 531,396 Hispanics living in the Commonwealth, comprising 6.84% of the total population (Weldon Cooper Center, 2008). The Hispanic population tripled in Virginia between 1990 and 2006 (Cai, 2008). This growth in the Hispanic population causes Virginia to be designated a “New Hispanic State” (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). Based on this statistical information, it is evident that Latino strengths and challenges must be taken into account as policies are formed at state and local levels.

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB) serves as a conduit to carry two-way information between the Latino population and the Office of the Governor. VLAB’s mission is to inform the Governor about issues affecting the Latino community as well as to inform the Latino community regarding government initiatives, state services, and available resources. In order to perform this mission in 2009, VLAB planned, organized, and implemented six town hall meetings that were held in six geographical regions of the state: Northern Virginia, Roanoke, Eastern Shore, Charlottesville, Shenandoah, and Richmond. Strategies were developed and evaluated throughout the process, with the ultimate goal of engaging the Latino community, both in terms of established community leaders and of community members whose voices are not often part of discussions about the community. VLAB members representing these areas worked in committees to provide the venues, as well as to publicize and facilitate for the town hall meetings. Members from other regions across the state attended the meetings as well to demonstrate support for the community. Each meeting had its own character, reflecting the community members who assisted and attended the meetings, but all had in common a desire to address the needs of the community as perceived by the community members.

This report has three principal components: 1) an introduction to the strategies and methodologies used in facilitating the town hall meetings; 2) a report on each individual town hall meeting, including the concerns and recommendations voiced at each meeting; and 3) final recommendations for the Governor, representing the aggregated data from the six meetings. The data are compelling and represent the voices of a cross-section of the Latino community in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Below is a summary of the recommendations from the town hall meetings, representing the salient topics that emerged from the meetings: 1) public safety; 2) health and human services; 3) education; and 4) immigration:

Public Safety:

- Drivers’ licenses, or at the very least state identification cards, should be available regardless of immigration status for Virginia residents.
- Programs and information sessions should be funded to educate the Latino community about the role of law enforcement in Virginia with the goal of changing the perspective of the community from feelings of fear to feelings of security and support.

- Education programs should be provided to help Latinos realize that legal status can be questioned only when a person is arrested for a legitimate offense.
- Education programs should be offered to educate Latinos about their human rights regardless of immigration status.
- Local and state law enforcement should not be asked to enforce federal immigration law.

Health and Human Services:

- Emergency services should be protected by reversing proposed cuts to the Trauma Fund, which pays for Emergency Room staff on nights and weekends.
- Efforts should be made to seek partnerships, provide scholarships, loan repayment programs, and other incentives to increase the number of bilingual and multicultural medical care providers in Virginia.
- The reform of health insurance regulations should be promoted to allow insurance companies to reimburse for health care services that immigrants receive in Virginia.
- Better access to health care should be supported regardless of income and immigration status.
- Agencies receiving state funding should be provided with adequate funds to supply outreach and interpreter services.

Education:

- More resources and policies should be directed toward ensuring equal access to quality education provided by highly qualified English language teachers.
- Programs need to be funded and available to involve the parents of English language learners in the education of their children.
- School-community liaisons need to be available in schools to improve parent participation and to disseminate information to parents.
- Students who demonstrate academic potential and the desire to attend institutions of higher education should be able to do so without paying out-of-state tuition.
- Support needs to be continued for the Hispanic Youth Symposia as a means of involving Latino students in higher education.

Immigration:

- Passage of federal comprehensive immigration reform should be supported.
- VLAB should support participation in the Census by all Latinos in Virginia, providing education to counteract underground movements to boycott the Census.

The town hall meetings provided evidence that the Latino community desires to be civically involved in the regions where they lived. The recommendations reveal thoughtful insight into issues that affect the Latino community, as well as many other minority and economically challenged populations in the state. As the Latino population increases, it is essential that the Virginia state government address these issues effectively and justly. As a Board, we offer these recommendations with the hope they will be reviewed, considered, and implemented for the improvement of not only Latinos, but all Virginians.

References:

Cai, Qian. (January 4, 2008). Hispanic immigrants and citizens in Virginia. Presented to the Virginia Commission on Immigration. Retrieved on September 28, 2009 from <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/siefiles/documents/pdfs/presentations/immigration-final.pdf>.

Fry, R., & Gonzales, F. (2008). One-in-five and growing fast: A profile of Hispanic public school students. Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved on September 28, 2009 from <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/92.pdf>.

Statistical portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2007. (March 5, 2009). Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved on September 28, 2009 from <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=46>.

Weldon Cooper Center. Demographics and Workforce. Retrieved on September 28, 2009 from <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/POPULATION%20ESTIMATES/>.



Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Advocating for the Interests of Latinos across the Commonwealth

Introduction

Overview

The Virginia Latino Advisory Commission (VLAC) was created by Executive Order in October of 2003 by former Governor Mark R. Warner to provide information about the growing Latino community in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The VLAC was signed into law and made a permanent board two years later on October 15, 2005.

Today the Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB) serves at the pleasure of Governor Tim Kaine so that his administration can best serve the Latino constituents of Virginia. The VLAB meets four times a year to hear from local communities across the state, to discuss issues facing Latinos in Virginia, and to develop reports articulating their recommendations to the Governor on matters such as health, business, and education.

The Board consists of 21 citizen members appointed by the Governor, 15 who must be of Latino descent. The initial appointments of VLAB members are staggered to include seven members for a one-year term, six members for a two-year term, five members for a three-year term, and three members for a four-year term. After the initial staggering of terms, board members will serve a term of four years.

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board was created in recognition of one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Virginia and the nation as a whole. The mission of the VLAB is to serve these Virginians who enrich our state and to call upon government officials, local communities, and all constituents to take part in the positive changes that are making Virginia an even better place to live.

Authority

CHAPTER 636

An Act to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Chapter 24 of Title 2.2 an article numbered 21, consisting of sections numbered [2.2-2459](#), [2.2-2460](#), and [2.2-2461](#), relating to the Latino Advisory Board..

[H 2420]

Approved March 23, 2005

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Chapter 24 of Title 2.2 an article numbered 21, consisting of sections numbered [2.2-2459](#), [2.2-2460](#), and [2.2-2461](#), as follows:

*Article 21.
Latino Advisory Board.*

§ [2.2-2459](#). *Latino Advisory Board; membership; terms; compensation and expenses.*

A. The Latino Advisory Board (the Board) is established as an advisory board, within the meaning of § [2.2-2100](#), in the executive branch of state government. The Board shall consist of 21 nonlegislative citizen members, at least 15 of whom shall be of Latino descent, who shall be appointed by the Governor and serve at his pleasure. In addition, the Secretaries of the Commonwealth, Commerce and Trade, Education, Health and Human Resources, Public Safety, and Transportation, or their designees shall serve as ex officio members without voting privileges. All members shall be residents of the Commonwealth.

B. After the initial staggering of terms, nonlegislative citizen members shall be appointed for a term of four years. Appointments to fill vacancies shall be for the unexpired terms. No member shall be eligible to serve more than two successive four-year terms; however, after the expiration of the remainder of a term to which a member was appointed to fill a vacancy, two additional terms may be served by such member if appointed thereto.

C. The Board shall elect from its membership a chairman and vice chairman. A majority of the members of the Board shall constitute a quorum. Meetings of the Board shall be limited to four per year and shall be held upon the call of the chairman or whenever the majority of the members so request.

D. Members of the Board shall receive no compensation for their services, but shall be reimbursed for all reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as provided in §§ [2.2-2813](#) and [2.2-2825](#).

§ [2.2-2460](#). *Powers and duties; acceptance of gifts and grants.*

A. The Board shall have the power and duty to:

1. Advise the Governor regarding the development of economic, professional, cultural, educational, and governmental links between the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Latino community in Virginia, and Latin America;

2. Undertake studies, symposiums, research, and factual reports to gather information to formulate and present recommendations to the Governor relative to issues of concern and importance to the Latino community in the Commonwealth; and

3. Advise the Governor as needed regarding any statutory, regulatory, or other issues of importance to the Latino community in the Commonwealth.

B. The Board may apply for, accept, and expend gifts, grants, or donations from public or private sources to enable it to carry out its objectives.

§ [2.2-2461](#). *Staff; cooperation from other state agencies.*

The Office of the Governor shall serve as staff to the Board. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall assist the Board upon request.

2. That the intent of this act is to codify the Latino Advisory Commission, which exists pursuant to an executive order of the Governor, as the Latino Advisory Board, a permanent advisory board in the executive branch.
3. That the initial appointments of nonlegislative citizen members in accordance with this act shall be staggered as follows: seven members for a one-year term, six members for a two-year term, five members for a three-year term, and three members for a four-year term.
4. That the provisions of this act shall become effective on October 15, 2005

2009 Meetings

Board Meetings: Dates and Locations

February 6, 2009, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Bon Secours Richmond Health System
4121 Cox Road, Suite 1101 BSR Room (1st floor)
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060

June 12, 2009, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Omni Hotel
1600 5th Street
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902

August 21, 2009, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Department of Motor Vehicles
2300 West Broad Street Room 119
Richmond, Virginia 23220

September 21, 2009, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Department of Motor Vehicles
2300 West Broad Street Room 119
Richmond, Virginia 23220

Town Hall Meetings: Dates and Locations

Northern Virginia Town Hall
March 28, 2009, 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Charles Houston Recreation Center
901 Wythe Street
Alexandria, Virginia

Roanoke Town Hall
May 9, 2009, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Dumas Culture Center
108 Henry Street
Roanoke, Virginia 24011

Eastern Shore Town Hall
June 7, 2009, 2:00 pm -4:00 pm
Northampton Middle School
7247 Young Street
Machipongo, Virginia 23405

Charlottesville Town Hall
June 12, 2009, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Albemarle County Office Building
1600 5th Street
Charlottesville, Virginia 22901

Shenandoah/Winchester Town Hall
August 8, 2009, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Daniel Morgan Middle School
48 South Purcell Avenue
Winchester, Virginia 22601

Richmond Town Hall
August 21, 2009, 6:00pm -- 8:00 pm
City of Richmond Hispanic Liaison Office South Side Plaza
4100 Hull Street Road
Richmond, Virginia 23224

Committee Members for Town Hall Meetings 2009

Northern Virginia

- Eddie Reyes, Chair
- Rosaura Aguerreberre
- Leni Gonzalez
- Zuraya Tapia-Alfaro

Southwest Virginia

- Yolanda Puyana, Chair
- Gresilda Tilley-Lubbs

Hampton Roads

Eastern Shore

- Soraya Buckner, Chair
- Beatriz Amberman
- Rene Cabral-Daniels

Shenandoah/Winchester

- Charlotte Fritts, Chair
- Teresa Gonzalez
- Esteban Nieto

Charlottesville

- Peter Loach, Chair
- Luisa Soaterna

Richmond

- Luisa Soaterna, Chair
- Victor Gomez
- Omar Rashid
- Michel Zajur

Demographics

According to statistical data published by the Pew Hispanic Center, the 2007 Hispanicⁱⁱ population was 45,378,596, comprising 15% of the U.S. population. This exponential growth has an impact on every aspect of society, including public safety, health and human services, and education. As an example of this impact, between 1990 and 2006, the number of Hispanic students in U.S. public schools doubled to make up 60% of the total growth in public school students. In Virginia, between the years of 1990 and 2007, the number of Hispanic children in schools increased by 62,000, representing a 230% growth rate (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). The prediction is that by 2050, school-age Hispanic children will outnumber school-age non-Hispanic children (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008).

These population changes affect the Commonwealth of Virginia directly, with 531,396 Hispanics living in the Commonwealth, comprising 6.84% of the total population (Weldon Cooper Center, 2008). The Hispanic population tripled in Virginia between 1990 and 2006 (Cai, 2008). This growth in the Hispanic

population causes Virginia to be designated a “New Hispanic State” (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). Based on this statistical information, it is evident that Latino strengths and challenges must be taken into account as policies are formed at state and local levels.

Town Hall Strategies



When the new board convened in February 2009, a decision was made to host town hall meetings in as many geographical regions of the state as possible. In each region, board members agreed to assume the responsibility for arranging the logistics of the meeting, including the venue for the meeting, publicity to inform the community about the meeting, and arrangements of any details regarding the organization of the meeting. Board members living in the various regions took responsibility for forming a steering committee, arranging committee members, and maintaining the schedule.

Six town hall meetings were scheduled, with the meetings in Charlottesville and Richmond following the board meetings held earlier in the day. The other four town hall meetings were scheduled for times apart from the board meetings. The regions of Northern Virginia, Southwest Virginia, Eastern Shore, Central Virginia, Shenandoah, and Richmond represented the regions where board members live. This geographical representation also represents the widespread geographical locations of Latinos living in the Commonwealth. Each town hall had its own distinct character and organizational method, based largely on the knowledge the committee possessed regarding the Latino community in their region.

At the board meeting following each town hall meeting, the committees presented reports about the town halls they had hosted in the interim. The board analyzed each town hall, seeking the strengths and challenges of each meeting. They also analyzed the findings from the meetings. When the board held its final meeting and discussed the findings from the six meetings, it became apparent that certain common themes emerged from all the meetings, but at the same time, themes pertinent to the region informed each meeting. In addition, the board concluded that when holding town hall meetings in Latino communities, certain strategies are more dynamic than others.

Some of the town hall meetings focused on presenting information to the community, relying on experts from the board as well as the community to provide a program. Other town halls emphasized providing the opportunity for community members to voice their concerns and recommendations. Still others combined the information with dialogue, first presenting a formal information session and then opening the floor to comments and suggestions. The consensus among the board members was that community members seemed more engaged and expressed greater interest in the town hall meetings that focused on dialogue with the community rather than on formal presentations. However, information does need to be available for those who seek it, whether in available print materials or by having board members present to answer questions from the community.

In all, the final analysis revealed that town hall meetings provide an invaluable venue for following VLAB’s mission to serve as a two-way conduit between the Governor and the community. The town halls serve as outreach to the community. They also provide a way for community members to develop a sense of ownership in their communities and in the state.

In the section that follows, *Town Hall Snapshots*, each town hall will be presented in terms of venue, participants, and topics. They are presented in chronological order, which allows the reader to follow the changes that occurred as the result of knowledge obtained from the previous town halls. The recommendations are presented as raw data, allowing the reader to sense the concerns that permeate the different regions of the state. Many recommendations that emerged from the community are beyond the realm of possibility due to policies and economic factors. Nonetheless, they provide evidence of the concerns that frame the lives of Latinos living in the Commonwealth. In the next section, *Recommendations*, the findings have been analyzed and presented as salient issues that can be addressed to the Governor. Finally, in *Conclusions*, we summarize the efforts represented by the town hall meetings.

Town Hall Snapshots

Northern Virginia

The Northern Virginia town hall meeting was held in Alexandria at the Recreation Center in Old Town. This venue was chosen for being neutral and accessible, modern and free. Twenty participants attended. The meeting was conducted primarily in English since most people were English-speaking. There was no interpreter.

The meeting:

- Sindy Benavides, Latino liaison to the Governor at that time, opened the meeting by presenting an overview of VLAB.
- A community member presented about health care.
- Rosaura Aguerreberre presented an overview of education, generating many questions from the audience.
- Eddie Reyes provided an overview of public safety.
- A representative from the Sheriff's department addressed questions about deportation.
- The topic of Census 2010 arose repeatedly from the audience, with concern expressed regarding the current immigration situation.

Recommendations:

- Policies need to be developed that assure that immigrants have the right to attend institutions of higher education.
- Quality education in ESL needs to be provided despite budget cuts in public education.
- The Governor and his office should consider participating in public service announcements regarding the importance and safety of the Census for immigrants, encouraging them to participate.
- Cameras should be installed in police cars to assure greater justice and equity.

Roanoke

The Southwest Virginia town hall meeting took place in Roanoke at the Dumas Culture Center, located in downtown Roanoke. This venue was chosen for being neutral and accessible, modern and free, with free parking readily available. Sixty-five participants attended. The meeting was conducted primarily in

Spanish since most people were Spanish-speaking. Board members provided interpretation for English speakers. The event was publicized by announcements and flyers in Latino gathering places as well as through listservs and meetings associated with Virginia Tech.

The meeting:

- Yolanda Puyana welcomed the group and explained the purpose of the meeting.
- Kris Tilley-Lubbs did a short presentation about Latino demographics in the Commonwealth.
- Leni Gonzalez presented the changes in Virginia drivers' licenses.
- Zuraya Tapia-Alfaro presented ways to contact representatives regarding immigration policy.
- Participants were then invited to visit each of the four tables where board members facilitated, gathering information on large paper from the participants regarding the following topics:
 - Driver's license
 - Immigration
 - Education
 - Health services
- As a wrap-up, the board members and participants presented the information written on the sheets.

Recommendations written or dictated by participants:

Driver's License:

- The Governor should propose a law that indicates that undocumented persons have access to a driver's license.
 - A male mentioned a terrible accident in which four people died because the driver was never tested for driving knowledge and he was driving unlicensed.
 - The police are profiling the Latino community, who are being stopped for minor infractions and issues.
 - The benefits of having an ID/driving permit outweigh the negative comments.
 - Having a driving permit will allow people to be safe on the roads.
 - Other people also mentioned how many times a month they get stopped by the police and said they have paid lots of money in fines.

Health and Human Resources:

- Immigration reform will improve health related services.
- Health care is too expensive and needs to be more affordable, not only for Latinos but for everyone.
- Agencies receiving state funds should require more money for outreach services and a bilingual staff to connect the community.
- There needs to be a directory of service providers.

Education:

- Undocumented students with potential and a desire to attend college should be able to do so without paying out-of-state tuition.
- There is a need for alternative programs (vocational programs) for undocumented students.
- Every parent should have access to becoming literate in Spanish to better be able to learn English.
- Every public school should have a person to serve as a liaison with the community in order to provide information and answer questions in reference to their children's education.
- Charter schools should be considered as an alternative to concentrate ESL teaching for all immigrants. The charter school concept would also teach students the necessary language to understand the specifics of each subject.

Immigration:

- Observe best practices in immigration reform based on immigration reform from Spain. [One community participant was from Spain.]
- Develop common strategies in Spanish to address local issues.
- Look for how immigrants can help to build capacity in the economy, workforce, etc.
- Support Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR).
- CIR can decrease abuse of undocumented.
- Educate more immigrants of their civil rights.
- Use churches to understand Latino community.
- Form a committee of local Latino leaders that advise the police chief and form a community crime network with the advice of the police chief.
- Government needs to create a relationship with leaders such as priest, ministers, etc.
- Use CIR as a tool to fight crime locally to ensure safety for all.
- Support the Dream Act.

Eastern Shore

The Eastern Shore town hall was held at Northampton Middle School in Machipongo. The venue was accessible for the Latino community in the Northampton area, but the distance was greater for those in Accomack County. In addition, the place was familiar for people whose children attend the school, but it may not have been familiar for other community members. The most familiar, comfortable place would have been St. Peter Catholic Church, because they host numerous events with the Consulates of Mexico and Guatemala. Also the religious and migrant counselors have offices there, so people are accustomed to going to the church for non-religious events. The church is located in the middle of the peninsula, which would have also contributed to its accessibility, but a religious institution was inappropriate for a town hall.

To promote the event, flyers were distributed at the following places: the soccer game in Pungoteague; the Catholic church; the food bank at Telamon Corporation, where agricultural workers receive services; and Six L's labor camp in Painter. Press releases were emailed to schools, migrant head start programs, the Literacy Council, Eastern Shore Community College adult education and ESL departments, and all growers in the area. The press release appeared in the newspaper and on the radio in English since there is no radio in Spanish in the area. The press release was also faxed to the Board of Supervisors, Perdue and Tyson human resources offices, and the Department of Social Services in Northampton and Accomack.

The meeting was conducted in English and Spanish. Fifteen community members participated. The objective of the town hall was to promote dialogue with the Latino community and organizations, and when possible, to answer questions and concerns. The main goal was to allow community members to express their concerns and problems.

The meeting:

- Leni Gonzalez presented the changes in Virginia drivers' licenses.
- Zuraya Tapia-Alfaro presented ways to contact representatives regarding immigration policy.

Major issues of concern:**Public safety:**

- Participants expressed concern about not being able to obtain a driver's license.

- Assure that local law enforcement officials are cognizant of their legal limitations when dealing with immigrants.
 - An arrest was reported during which local law enforcement had not observed protocol.
 - Anecdotal evidence was reported regarding abusive behavior from other minority groups in the area.

Health & Human Resources

- Concern was expressed regarding lack of sufficient professional interpretation services at Accomack Health Department.
 - The Director of the Health Department was present and stated his intention to rectify the situation.
 - He also promised to implement cultural sensitive training for the Health Department staff.

Charlottesville

The Charlottesville town hall was held at the Albemarle County Office Building. This venue was chosen for being neutral and accessible, modern and free, with free parking readily available. Seventy-five participants attended. The meeting was conducted in Spanish with some assistance provided for English-speaking participants.

The meeting:

- A local group provided a meal for all attendees.
- Peter Loach served as the moderator for the group, writing on a large pad of paper on an easel the participants' comments.
- Leni Gonzalez presented the changes in Virginia drivers' licenses.
- The rest of the meeting consisted of questions and concerns from the community participants.
- Board members who were present answered questions as was possible.
- The presence of the community was evident in the planning and implementation of the town hall.

Public Comments:

Drivers' licenses:

- We have many difficulties because we cannot get driver's licenses.
- You cannot get a driver's license without proper immigration documents.
- There is a lot of confusion about international driver's licenses, which are not valid in US.
- People have paid for licenses that are not valid.
- Driver's license scams must be stopped.

Law enforcement:

- What is the policy with respect to the local law enforcement officials and whether they check immigration status?
- There is a lot of fear that people will be detained when stopped for a driving violation.
- We should organize a community dinner between the police and the community.

Immigration:

- Simplify the process for applying for legal immigration status.
- Support comprehensive immigration reform in Washington.

- What can we say to the government to convince them to reform the law?
- We need to get organized to push reform.
- We must work together to tell the politicians what we want.

Education:

- It is difficult getting access to ESL teaching.
- Special needs students are not getting special services in city schools.

Health care:

- Access to health care for families is a big problem.
- Are discounted medical services available?
- Emergency rooms are much more expensive.
- We must take care of our health by eating better and exercising more.

Organizing the community

- Many people do not get involved or meet with local leaders.
- An organized community is a better educated one.
- A stronger community and better communication lead to greater confidence.

Shenandoah Valley/Winchester

The Shenandoah Valley town hall meeting was held at Daniel Morgan Middle School in Winchester. Seventy-five participants attended.

The meeting:

- The town hall followed a pre-session for allied professionals seeking greater interaction with the Latino community. This session was facilitated by the Latino Connection and included presentations from representatives from Immigration and Human Rights, LLC and from the Salvation Army.
- Issues such as trafficking, immigrant rights abuses, language access, and discrimination were discussed. These were identified as issues that immigrant families face.

Concerns expressed by participants:

- VLAB needs to establish stronger ties with the Latino community:
- Efforts need to be made to assure that leaders in the Latino community actually represent the wishes of the community.
- The 287g program should not be authorized to exist within the Commonwealth. The Governor should take action to eliminate this policy within law enforcement agencies in Virginia and should empower VLAB to study the impact that this memorandum has had on Latinos with regards to their being profiled or withholding crime reporting.
- Training should be offered to members in the community who seek to become more aware of how to advocate effectively for legislation benefiting the Latinos, such as state and national efforts to expand access to higher education for undocumented students.

Richmond

The Richmond town hall meeting was held at the City of Richmond Hispanic Liaison Office South Side Plaza. Sixty participants attended the meeting.

Transportation:

- Continuously communicate to the Governor the need for legislation to be passed so that drivers' licenses can be obtained regardless of immigration status.
- Support the increase of public transportation efforts all over the state since many Latinos depend on public transportation for work and leisure.

Health and Human Resources:

- Protect emergency services in Virginia by reversing cuts proposed to the Trauma Fund, which pays for Emergency Room staff on nights on weekends.
- To improve both the quality of and access to health care in Virginia, seek partnerships, provide scholarships, loan repayment programs and other incentives to increase the number of bilingual and multicultural medical care providers in Virginia.
- Promote reforming health insurance regulation to allow for foreign insurance companies to reimburse for health care services that immigrants receive in Virginia.
- Recommend that funds be provided to increase resources in programs that deal with obesity in children and teenage pregnancy
- Provide training to service providers so that they can learn Spanish and become culturally competent.
- Increase efforts in foster care for Latino children.
- Increase efforts against human trafficking.

Education:

- In-state tuition should be available to students in good standing regardless of immigration status.
- GED classes in Spanish should be supported.
- After school activities for Latino children should be provided.

Immigration:

- Ask the Governor to intervene on behalf of the community to support immigration reform.
- Support participation in the Census by all Latinos in Virginia, and counteract with education the underground movement against Census participation.

Successful Strategies for Town Hall Meetings

From the town hall format, we obtained evidence these venues are an effective way to civically engage the Latino community. Community members who participated demonstrated an appreciation for having the opportunity to voice their concerns. Many participants indicated a willingness to continue their engagement to achieve the changes they want to see. As a board, we will strive to continue to provide opportunities to serve as a two-way conduit between the community and the Governor.

Our analysis revealed that our outreach to the community was effective, but based on suggestions from the participants, certain best practices became apparent:

- At the outset of the meeting, VLAB needs to be transparent regarding the role of an advisory board to the Governor.
- There needs to be a large poster with the VLAB charter. With each recommendation from the public, the charter can be checked to see if the recommendation is within the realm of the VLAB mission.
- Town halls need to take place in places that are convenient and comfortable for the targeted community.
- Community organizations should be included in the planning of the town halls.
- Community presenters should be included in the planning stages and provided with definite expectations regarding time limits and topics.
- The VLAB committee should preview any PowerPoints to be presented.
- Publicity about the meeting needs to be released in a timely manner, keeping in mind the infrequency of and lead time required for some media.
- The public needs to recognize that the role of VLAB is not to tell people what to do, but rather to listen to the community and report to Governor what has been said. The Town Halls serve as a conduit to Governor.
- A moderator needs to guide the meeting.
- Someone needs to be at the front taking notes so the public can see what information has been generated.
- Provide a copy of the report to the Governor for the community leaders to demonstrate that we did include their recommendations in the report.

Final Recommendations to the Governor:

The town hall meetings provided evidence that the Latino community desires civic engagement in their locales. Their concerns and recommendations reveal thoughtful insight into issues that affect the Latino community, as well as many other minority and economically challenged populations in the state. As the Latino population increases, it is essential that the Virginia state government address these issues effectively and justly. As a board, we offer these recommendations for review, consideration, and implementation.

Certain themes emerged from the community at each of the town hall meetings. The salient themes from all six meetings regarded drivers' licenses and relationships with law enforcement. The prevalent issue that was mentioned in each meeting concerned the issue of identification, for the undocumented. Whether as a driver's license or an identity card, the question of documentation of immigrants came up at every town hall. In terms of relationships with law enforcement, many suggestions were made that indicate the need for measures that would develop trust between the community and law enforcement agencies.

Below is a summary of the recommendations from the town hall meetings, representing the salient topics that emerged from the meetings: 1) public safety; 2) health and human services; 3) education; and 4) immigration:

Public safety:

- Drivers' licenses, or at the very least state identification cards, should be available regardless of immigration status for Virginia residents.

- Programs and information sessions should be funded to educate the Latino community about the role of law enforcement in Virginia with the goal of changing the perspective of the community from feelings of fear to feelings of security and support.
- Education programs should be provided to help Latinos realize that legal status can be questioned only when a person is arrested for a legitimate offense.
- Education programs should be offered to educate Latinos about their human rights regardless of immigration status.
- Local and state law enforcement should not be asked to enforce federal immigration law.

Health and Human Services:

- Emergency services should be protected by reversing proposed cuts to the Trauma Fund, which pays for Emergency Room staff on nights and weekends.
- Efforts should be made to seek partnerships, provide scholarships, loan repayment programs, and other incentives to increase the number of bilingual and multicultural medical care providers in Virginia.
- The reform of health insurance regulations should be promoted to allow insurance companies to reimburse for health care services that immigrants receive in Virginia.
- Better access to health care should be supported regardless of income and immigration status.
- Agencies receiving state funding should be provided with adequate funds to supply outreach and interpreter services.

Education:

- More resources and policies should be directed toward ensuring equal access to quality education provided by highly qualified English language teachers.
- Programs need to be funded and available to involve the parents of English language learners in the education of their children.
- School-community liaisons need to be available in schools to improve parent participation and to disseminate information to parents.
- Students who demonstrate academic potential and the desire to attend institutions of higher education should be able to do so without paying out-of-state tuition.
- Support needs to be continued for the Hispanic Youth Symposia as a means of involving Latino students in higher education.

Immigration:

- Passage of federal comprehensive immigration reform should be supported.
- VLAB should support participation in the Census by all Latinos in Virginia, providing education to counteract underground movements to boycott the Census.

Conclusions

Depending on the stated purpose of town hall meetings in Latino communities, they can serve a dual function: 1) to provide insight into the strengths and challenges that reside in Latino communities, and 2) to disseminate information to community members. These interactions can dissipate correct information and strengthen trust between the community and government agencies. Town halls also provide exposure to the role of government agencies and to the role of civically engaged community members. Likewise, government agencies can benefit from learning about the perceptions that exist in the community. Finally

town hall meetings exemplify the mission of VLAB to serve as a two-way conduit between the community and the Governor.

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ⁱ Hispanic will be used when reporting statistical data to reflect the nomenclature used in the reports. In the rest of the document, Latino will be used to reflect the name of VLAB.

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