Oct-15-07 Governor Corzine Announces Recommendations by the Working Group on Latino Affairs

NEWS RELEASE
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GOVERNOR CORZINE ANNOUNCES RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE WORKING GROUP ON LATINO AFFAIRS

The group was established with the mandate to recommend the most efficient ways to deliver services to the New Jersey Latino community

PRINCETON - Governor Jon S. Corzine today made public the recommendations presented by the Governor’s Working Group on Latino Affairs during a gathering at Drumthwacket in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month.

“Furthering the progress of New Jersey's Hispanic community through cooperation and collaboration is an integral part of the economic and social success of New Jersey,” Governor Corzine said. “The recommendations by the Governor’s Working Group on Latino Affairs (WGLA) are part of a holistic approach by this administration to better direct resources so that Latino families and individuals attain the necessary services they seek. I welcome these recommendations and I look forward to continuing to work with this distinguished group of individuals. My administration will also be reaching out to the community for its feedback and strategy for effective implementation in addressing the economic, educational, and social needs of Latinos in New Jersey.”

WGLA is an interagency group that was convened in September of 2006 in an effort to create a statewide strategy to more efficiently direct the State’s delivery of services to the Latino community, particularly, those members of the community with limited English proficiency. WGLA members represent every major department and agency of the executive branch and every member was recommended directly by his or her Commissioner. WGLA is co-chaired by Al Alvarez, Policy Advisor, Governor’s Office; Javier Inclán, Director of Constituent Relations and Intergovernmental Affairs, Governor’s Office; and Angie Armand, Director of the Hispanic Center for Policy and Research Development within the Department of Community Affairs.

The eight recommendations are listed below:

1. Establish a Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigrant Policy. (Gov. Corzine signed E.O. 78, August 6, 2007 establishing an Immigrant Advisory Panel). Although the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over immigration policy, it is the States that set policies to help new immigrants integrate into the economic, social, and civic fabric of society. Thus, WGLA’s recommendation is to convene an Advisory Panel to examine and assess how New Jersey is addressing immigrant policy. Among other things, the Panel can examine ways to better promote and coordinate economic
opportunity and asset development, encourage English language attainment, and support greater civic engagement.

2. **Institute a Statewide Policy on Language Access and Cultural Competency by Providing Translation Services for all Departments.** The majority of State departments in New Jersey do not sufficiently translate their information into languages other than English, according to an informal survey conducted by WGLA of all departments. This recommendation would direct Treasury to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) with the intent to award State contracts to the most responsible and qualified vendors of translation services. These contracts would be open to all departments and agencies to take advantage of. The RFP would provide sufficient quality control and cost-saving mechanisms up front to ensure that only vendors who can provide accurate and culturally competent translations are selected.

3. **Establish Mandates and Expectations Regarding Data Collection by the State.** Direct the Executive Branch to institute the necessary policies and procedures in order to standardize the racial, ethnicity and primary language data collection in order to more systematically address issues of disparity. This can be accomplished by adopting the standard data collection guidelines based on the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive No. 15. The Policy Directive revises standards for the classification of federal data on race and ethnicity.

4. **Eliminate Language Barriers that Contribute to Health Disparities for People with Limited English Proficiency.** Inadequacies in language interpretation impose a detrimental effect in medical care to patients and contribute to increased costs to both patients and healthcare providers. Accordingly, this recommendation seeks to accomplish the following: Adopt licensure requirements and State regulations that mandate sufficient access to language services for Limited English Proficient patients; Adopt regulations that require Medicaid/SCHIP reimbursement for interpreter services as a separate and distinct billing code, and; Allow for the use of federal Medicaid and SCHIP matching reimbursement funds for training.

5. **Define Policies for State Contractors to Follow in Order to Provide Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services.** State agencies contract with community organizations to provide services to immigrant residents. These contractors address the specialized language and cultural needs of their communities by removing the language barrier and providing services to various ethnic groups in their native languages. However, there are no established guidelines for these or other agencies to deliver services that are culturally and linguistically competent. To address this issue, this recommendation suggests convening a Statewide Task Force on Contracts & Services. The Task Force would work collaboratively with contracting agencies including members of Hispanic community-based organizations to create mutually beneficial standards for the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate services. This standard would be a condition of new State agency contracts and State agency contract renewals. In addition, this recommendation calls for a separate Task Force on Social Services to be created to address the manner in which the State can work collaboratively with the Hispanic Community-Based Organizations to provide more efficient services under existing programs to people with Limited English Proficiency.
6. **Hold Various Latino Economic Expositions Regarding the Corzine Administration’s Urban Economic Initiatives.** These expositions would assemble Latino business people, entrepreneurs, community and political leaders and others who could potentially take advantage of the opportunities presented by the various urban initiatives undertaken by this administration. Examples of urban initiatives include the New Jersey Urban Fund and State contracting opportunities provided through the Division of Minority- and Women-owned Business Development within the Governor’s Office of Economic Growth.

7. **Renew a Bilingual Teacher Recruitment Exchange Program with Spain and Examine the Possibility of Instituting a Similar Exchange Program with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.** There is a critical shortage of culturally competent and bilingually capable teachers in New Jersey’s school districts. The purpose of this initiative is to increase the number of much needed qualified bilingual teachers in the State. The Spanish Ministry of Education through the Spanish Embassy offers U.S. school districts the opportunity to recruit foreign language and bilingual teachers from Spain to teach at elementary, middle and high school levels. Because of the high quality of their preparation these teachers also add a strong bicultural dimension to their service. In addition, due to the large concentration of Puerto Ricans in this State and the proximity of the Island, this recommendation directs the New Jersey Department of Education to research and analyze the scope of activities needed to institute a similar program between New Jersey and Puerto Rico.

8. **Translate Educational Statewide Assessments into Spanish.** The majority language of two-thirds of the limited English proficient student population in New Jersey is Spanish. Native Spanish language speakers represent the overwhelming majority of students that are served in bilingual programs and receive literacy instruction in their native language. Spanish-speaking students who are recent immigrants and for whom English is a new language are not able to understand the State assessments in English, yet, federal regulations under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation requires that all students take State assessments regardless of language proficiency. A Statewide assessment in Spanish would accurately measure whether these students are meeting State standards in language arts, science and math.