



My name is Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz and I am here on behalf of the Latino Action Network Foundation to speak on the 75% budget cut to the Hispanic Women's Resource Centers that is currently in the budget. Our ask is that the legislature continue fully funding this program at \$4.04 million. For those less familiar, we launched a 6-year campaign to reinstate this program after it was cut by Former Governor Christie in 2010. Since the funding was launched in 2016, we have provided employment and training services to thousands of Latina women. The funding for this program is at the forefront of bridging the pay gap for Latina immigrant women. And, we do that by being proactive to make concrete community-based strategies to ensure Latina women can overcome the structural barriers that prevent them from fully-participating in the workforce and the economy.

In 2023, we served 4,178 Latina immigrant women through our programs. But, it's not just about the numbers but the impact and the stories from women throughout the entire state. We serve not only the urban centers of Newark and Camden, but funding for this program has opened doors in underserved suburban and rural areas of NJ like Morris County, Monmouth and Ocean Counties, Atlantic and, yes, we reach the Latino families in Vineland.

If this cut remains in the current budget, Latina mothers lose access to not just ESL classes but the opportunity to simultaneously participate in GED preparation in Spanish - our programs are the only ones providing this free of charge and with childcare and transportation support, scholarships to join the early childhood and childcare workforce, become dental



hygienists, or even a small business owner as a tailor because they attended sewing classes our Hispanic Women's resource Center in Asbury Park.

And, we are distinct from other employment and training programs with a Department of Labor workforce development program. We are funded under the NJ Department of Children and Families - Division on Women because our programs are at the forefront of strengthening families. We have gathered letters of support from people like:

- A child in Newark, who wrote to Commissioner Beyer about how the Hispanic Women's Resource Center at La casa de Don Pedro helped their mom take ESL and computer classes and can now help them with their homework. He drew a heart and said "English to do homework."
- Luisa Ochoa, a mother and grandmother living in Randolph, NJ who became a US citizen after citizenship preparation classes, participates in trauma-informed yoga to cope with the stress of immigration, and provided her personal testimony at yesterday's Senate hearing in English because she is a proud student of the Centro para la mujer at the Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs.

And, we invite all legislators on today's committee to visit a Hispanic Women's Resource Center that serves constituencies in your district. We welcome you while our doors are still open.