



Good morning. My name is Saray Ramos, and I am here to testify in support of Bill S934/A669 on behalf of the Latino Action Network Foundation. The Latino Action Network Foundation is a statewide organization dedicated to uniting and elevating New Jersey's diverse Latinx communities through policy, advocacy, and research. One area of focus is housing, where we research housing issues affecting Latinx communities in New Jersey, develop policy proposals to address those issues, and conduct outreach among Latinx communities across the state, including low-income and immigrant communities.

On September 10, 2021, LANF co sponsored a housing roundtable where alongside our sister organization the Latino Action Network, and longtime ally, the Fair Share Housing Center [FSHC] we assessed the state's affordable housing situation and produced a policy report with policy recommendations based on national data, lived experiences, and community efforts. We came up with a number of recommendations to address the growing affordable housing crisis, including passage of legislation that would change the standards of creditworthiness for tenants seeking affordable housing subsidies. In this case, as per the legislation, credit scores “shall not be used in any manner to evaluate the creditworthiness of an affordable housing applicant.”

Building credit through mortgages, student loans, credit cards, and car loans is inherently biased because structural inequities prevent low-income individuals and people of color from accessing wealth-generating opportunities. They also exacerbate inequality by determining a consumer’s access to future opportunities. Credit history is used as a gatekeeper for many important necessities such as housing. According to the Census, over 50% of Latinos and Black people nationwide are renters, with many of these families struggling to make ends meet—a struggle that has been made more difficult by the pandemic. It has also been found that in New



Jersey, 26 percent of Latino families spend more than half of their earnings on housing, while 25 percent of Black families do the same. People of color, and the friends and family to whom they may turn, are far less able to cushion the blow of financial disasters such as job losses, income reductions, sickness, or unplanned expenses because they have fewer assets to draw on.

S934/A669 proposes a solution to the conflict of creditworthiness. The bill requires the adoption of fair, just, and reasonable creditworthiness and fitness to be a tenant standards, guidelines, and procedures. We are currently experiencing one of the worst housing crises in recent memory. Lower-income people are being unfairly denied a meaningful opportunity to find a safe and suitable place to live. We urge you to act quickly to limit the damage by scheduling a vote at the next Committee meeting; voting to release the bill and send it to the floor; and doing whatever else is necessary to ensure that the bill is enacted as soon as possible. The passage of this legislation is one of the many next best steps to minimizing the consequences of an out-of-control housing market and preventing homelessness.

Thank you for your time.