



Latinas Persevering in the Age of Trump

**A New Jersey Perspective
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The summer of 2018 saw a relentless attack on immigrants unfold as the Trump Administration made anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy a cornerstone of its national agenda. In the late spring and early summer US Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] attempted to implement a “zero tolerance” policy on the southern border that led to the detention and separation of thousands of children from their parents. The separation was caused by the decision to prosecute parents and criminally detain them. The children, unable to be housed in correctional facilities, were separated and housed in different detention centers, often without contact with their parents. Past federal administrations routinely paroled the families into the United States pending a court hearing.ⁱ

The practice drew a rebuke from the United Nations which noted the policy violated the human rights of the asylum seekers. Some families remain separated as this report goes to print. The courts ultimately ordered the Trump Administration to speed up family reunifications and set a time limit on the time children could be detained separately from their parents.

At approximately the same time, Attorney General Jeff Sessions effectively ended the practice of granting asylum to the victims of spousal abuse. In a June 11 ruling, Sessions declared that “the mere fact that a country may have problems effectively policing certain crimes or that certain populations are more likely to be victims of crime, cannot itself establish an asylum claim.”ⁱⁱ

The assault on immigrant rights took a particularly bizarre turn when a pizza delivery man, father of two US citizen children and husband of a US citizen, was detained for six weeks after delivering pies to the Fort Hamilton military base in Brooklyn. Apparently, those on duty, rather than simply paying for dinner decided to run a background check on the man and determined he was undocumented and the subject of an immigration detainer. A federal judge released the Ecuadorean man in late July ruling he could pursue his appeals while living at home.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the midst of these attacks on immigrant dignity over a dozen panelists gathered to assess the challenges facing Latina women in New Jersey. The second annual roundtable was sponsored by the Community Affairs Resource Center of Monmouth County [CARC] and the Latino Action Network Foundation [LAN-F] on June 22, 2018. The panelists consisted of professionals and clients of the Latino community-based non-profits that administer New Jersey’s three Hispanic Women’s Resource Centers. The Centers are run by CARC, Asbury Park, La Casa de Don Pedro, Newark, and the Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey, Camden. They provide job training and employment guidance for Latinas, many of whom seek to break the cycle of domestic violence by attaining financial independence. Program administrators and clients from all the agencies participated in the Roundtable discussions aimed at proposing a policy agenda for Latinas with a particular focus on New Jersey.

A change of governors in the state offered a glimmer of local hope in the face of a cruel national environment. A new governor, Phil Murphy, was sworn into office in January and his message was one of acceptance and outreach to Latinos in general and immigrants specifically.

Early in his administration, Governor Murphy signaled his desire to allocate just over \$2 million to provide legal assistance to financially strapped immigrants facing deportation. In May, the governor signed legislation making undocumented college students, who graduated from

New Jersey high schools, eligible for financial aid. Governor Murphy, Senate Majority Leader Steve Sweeney, State Senator Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Annette Quijano have also pledged to work on legislation this year to provide undocumented residents with driving permission cards, a key policy objective of roundtable participants for the last two years.

Unfortunately, funding for the Hispanic Women’s Resource Centers did not benefit from the improved political climate in New Jersey. Funding for the centers was held hostage to a budget battle between Governor Murphy and Senator Sweeney which nearly shuttered the state. The governor did not include the centers in his initial budget and the funding was maintained as a result of legislative advocacy by Senators Sweeney and Ruiz. As a result, funding for the centers remained flat at \$250,000. This sum is half what the centers received in 2009, the year before Governor Chris Christie eliminated them from his first budget. The centers were partially restored in 2016 at current funding levels. LAN-F requested a \$1 million allocation this year to account for the years of neglect and the corrosive effects of inflation on the provision of services. Sadly, the centers receive less funding today than when they were established via legislation in 1990. A copy of the legislation establishing the centers is appended to this report. An increase in funding and the creation of a secure funding source for the centers was another key recommendation of the panelists.

The Centers current funding is about half of what it was when they were established in 1992. This disparity in funding becomes even more egregious when it is adjusted for inflation. **See Figure 2** According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics’ consumer price index, the dollar experienced an average inflation rate of 2.25% per year. Prices in 2018 are 74.47% higher than prices in 1992. **See Figure 1.** In other words, \$400,000 in 1992 is equivalent in purchasing

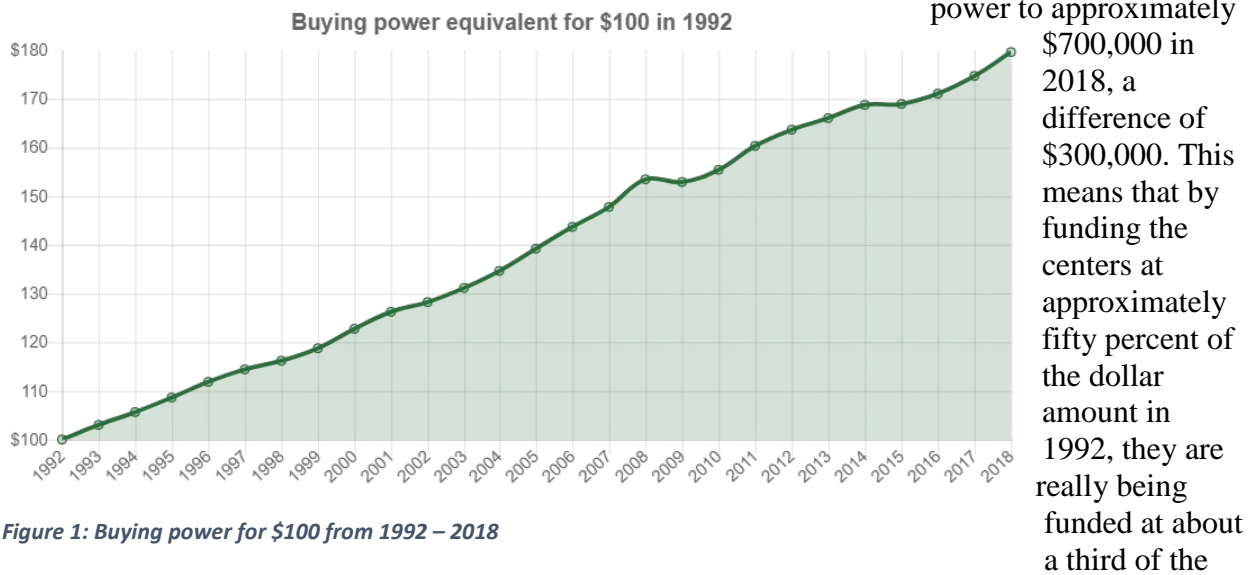


Figure 1: Buying power for \$100 from 1992 – 2018

power to approximately \$700,000 in 2018, a difference of \$300,000. This means that by funding the centers at approximately fifty percent of the dollar amount in 1992, they are really being funded at about a third of the level in today’s dollars. This starvation of the centers forces them to be understaffed and prevents them from fully serving the target population. **See the graph below:**

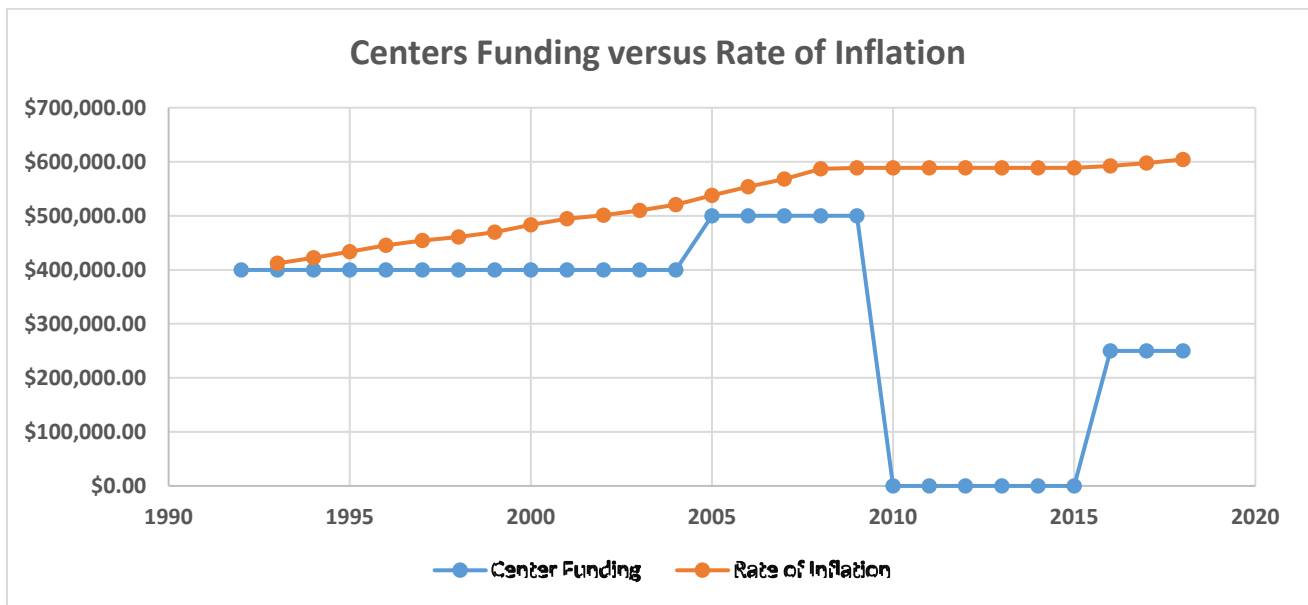


Figure 2: Center Funding versus Rate of Inflation

With all these factors in mind the organizers of the Roundtable asked the participants to consider the following four questions and be prepared to discuss them on the day of the event:

- **In a review of our last roundtable report, what action items were met, are the recommendations still relevant, and are there new issues that need to be addressed?**
- **What unique challenges do immigrant women face in the Trump era?**
- **On a State level, what new policies should we advocate for with the new gubernatorial administration – and what legislation and programming efforts should we advocate for?**
- **What sorts of deficiencies exist and how can we best address those issues?**

The goal was to develop and articulate an action plan as to how to proceed in this uncertain political and economic climate. Each participant was asked to consider a set of achievable goals in the next year on the local and state levels. They were asked to develop a policy agenda for legislators to consider that would improve the lives of immigrants in general and Latinas, more specifically.

The actions by Sessions with regards to asylum for victims of domestic violence, just days before the Roundtable convened, were of particular concern to the participants. Many of the clients served by the centers are victims of domestic violence but they find it difficult to leave their abusive spouses because of economic dependency. The centers work to help them develop job skills so they can establish economic independence and a new life free of their abusers.

Reflecting those concerns, the keynote speaker at the Roundtable was Elaine Hewins, Coordinator of the Domestic Violence Education and Awareness Program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. Hewins outlined a set of strategies for assisting the abused and a statewide policy agenda with regards to domestic violence.

Many of those suggestions were adopted by the Roundtable participants and as a result 5 of the 11 policy recommendations center around domestic violence issues. Those recommendations are reviewed in a separate section of this report apart from the broader policy suggestions. The first four recommendations were made last year but the advice went unheeded and so they remain policy objectives for 2018-2019. The ordering of the recommendations is not a reflection of their relative importance. The panelists sought to offer a variety of suggestions aimed at improving the life of Latinas and all New Jerseyans.

After a day of deliberations and debate the panelists, via consensus, agreed to the following policy agenda:

No. 1 – Passage of State Legislation allowing undocumented immigrants to drive. The panelists believe that Latino civil rights organizations, such as the Latino Action Network, should mobilize the community to get the legislation passed this year.

The ability to drive would ease the financial burden on hundreds of New Jersey families. Latinos, perhaps more than in other parts of the country, suffer as a result of the state's disjointed mass transit system. It is a suburban state so getting from one place to another, without a car, can be a frustrating and circuitous process. A sure sign of an immigrant neighborhood are the rows of bicycles parked in front of apartment complexes. With no ability to drive immigrants are forced to bicycle to work sometimes along major highways creating a safety hazard. Drivers licenses would establish a uniform standard of driving competence and require all vehicle operators to purchase insurance, a public safety bonanza for the state. The sale of licenses would also generate revenue for New Jersey.

Latinos are no longer concentrated in New Jersey's larger cities, as was true in the past, but the 2010 Census indicated that the community has spread across the state to suburban and rural areas. According to New Jersey Policy Perspective 464,000 out of 525,000 undocumented New Jersey residents will benefit from a change in the law.^{iv} This is no longer a cutting-edge idea but rather a well-tested and successful public policy. Twelve states, in addition to Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia have passed similar legislation.^v

No. 2 – The State needs to reinvigorate and restructure the partnership it had with the Latino community. One step is to renovate the role of the Center for Hispanic Policy Research and Development [CHPRD]. In 2010, the Christie Administration cut the Center's budget in half from \$5 million to \$2.5 million and eventually moved it from the Department of Community Affairs to the Department of State. The Center lost its uniquely Latino/Hispanic focus and programs became estranged from the community of Latino community-based non-profits. For 2019 the CHPRD has a budget of \$1.2 million.

Under the Christie Administration the mission of the Center was politicized and many of the grants were distributed to organizations with political ties to the past governor. With a new

director, Sandra Peña, there is an opportunity to re-establish the relationship and create a more collaborative exchange of ideas.^{vi}

The panelists suggested that Center programming should serve as a bulwark against national trends and through its funding address areas facing cuts by the Trump Administration. Many of the programs offered by the Center address these issues but at a level of funding well below what is necessary. Immigration clinics to safeguard the rights of the vulnerable, efforts at preventing family separation, and workforce and job training programs were seen as priorities. The current focus by the Center on youth internships and leadership development should be maintained.^{vii}

No. 3 – The funding for the Hispanic Women’s Resource Centers needs to be tied into a secure funding source codified in legislation. Funding for the centers are subjected to political whims on an annual basis. The most practical way to address this issue would be to legislatively link the centers to a specific funding source.

The Division on Women (DOW) under the NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF) currently administers funds for the Hispanic Women’s Resource Centers. DOW is a state department whose mission is to “create, promote and expand the rights and opportunities for all women in the State of New Jersey.”^{viii} According to the Pew Hispanic Center, there were 355,000 Latinas living in NJ as of 2008. The number of Hispanic women living in NJ has grown since then and advocacy for their advancement and employment needs has been neglected. In 2010, funds for the HWRC were cut in their entirety while the Hispanic Women’s Resource Centers in suburban districts, who serve primarily White middle-class women, were maintained.

HWRC’s programmatic achievements cannot be maintained when funding is discontinued for years and then only partially restored. The erratic nature of funding amounts to a failure by political leaders to recognize the important needs of a vital segment of the community and a failure of community leaders in rallying behind the program. Funding for the Hispanic Women’s Center should be included in DOW’s annual budget and programming. In addition, DOW should partner with community members in a collaborative needs assessment to identify the issues affecting the economic advancement and overall well-being of Latinas in NJ.

No. 4 – Expansion of Interpretive and Translation Services in the State Superior Court system and in hospitals and other health care facilities. Latinos frequently face a situation where they receive medical treatment or court information from people in a language they do not understand.

There need to be stricter regulations and guidelines requiring Spanish-language services in the courts, hospitals and other health care facilities. This needs to be addressed through additional legislation and regulation. The panelists also urged civil rights organizations to keep a watchful eye on these organizations to insure that proper language services are provided.

These shortcomings extend to many of the social service programs offered to the Latino community. With a new administration there needs to be a new commitment to providing culturally and linguistically sensitive programs.

No. 5 – The development of a statewide community outreach program by the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety to inform immigrants of the unscrupulous practices of *notarios*/notaries that prey on the desperation of the immigrant community. Significant funds should be employed using the network of Latino community-based non-profits as a focal point to get the word out about abusive practices.

In the era of Trump there are few opportunities for normalizing the immigration status of undocumented immigrants. As a result, unscrupulous operators set up businesses in immigrant communities across the state peddling false hope and dreams of a green card, often charging thousands of dollars for forms and information the immigrants can easily obtain online. What is even worse is that in many cases the immigrants not only pay for this freely available information, but also get the wrong advice from non-attorneys which can adversely impact their immigration status.

In many countries of Latin America notaries are quasi legal officials that can perform some government functions. Thus, rather than seeking legal advice from a lawyer or an accredited organization immigrants turn to notaries, not knowing the different role notaries play in the United States. Their primary role here is to serve the public as an impartial witness when important documents are signed.

No. 6 – The establishment of a state government agency or organization to deal with the vast array of issues facing immigrants in New Jersey. To that end, the panelists favored the re-establishment of the Commission of New Americans, a volunteer board established in 2010 in the closing days of the Jon Corzine Administration. Governor Christie took away all institutional support for the organization but never formally disbanded it. It has not met in several years.

The panelists did not rule out the establishment of a paid agency within state government but felt the recreation of the Commission was a strong first step. Latinos make up approximately 20 percent of the state’s population of 8.9 million, according to a 2016 estimate by the U.S. Census Bureau.^{ix} About 42 percent of the Latino population is foreign born.^x According to the US Census, the Latino population is projected to reach about 29 percent by 2060.^{xi}

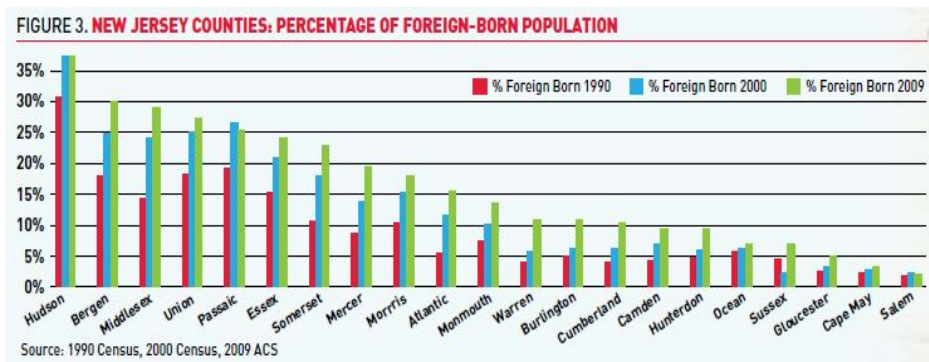


Figure 3: NJ Counties, Percentage of Foreign-Born Population

To put these growing numbers in perspective the Latino population of New Jersey was 1.1 million in 2000 or about 13 percent of the state’s population. Ten years later the Latino population rose to 1.5 million or about 17.6 percent, and now stands at over 1.7 million.^{xiii} [See the Graph contained in this report]. See figures 4 and 5.

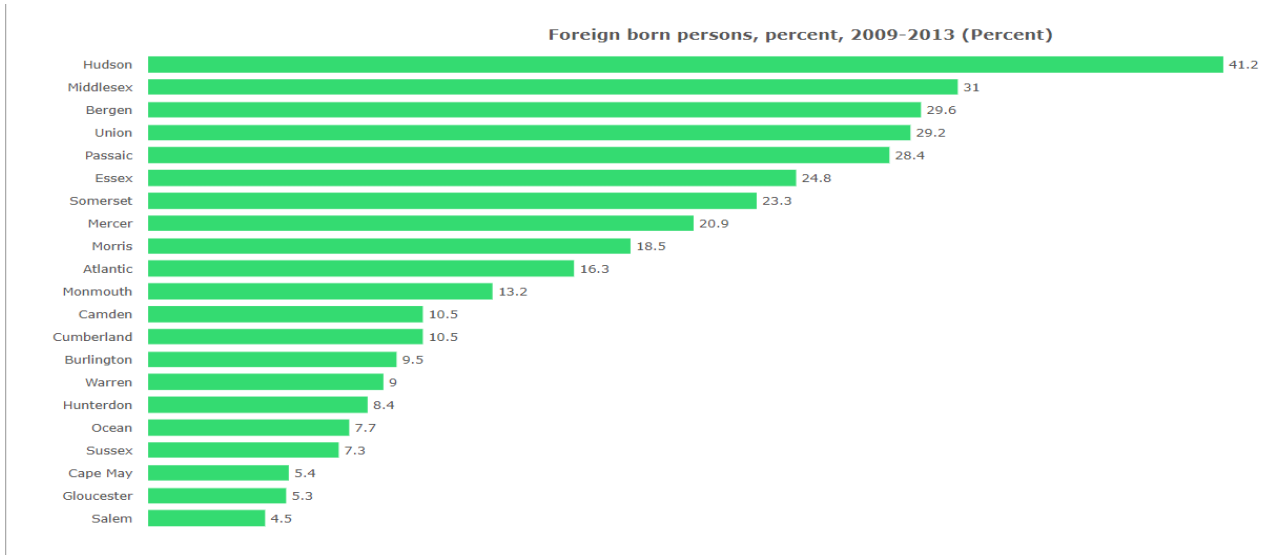


Figure 4: Foreign Born persons – Average from 2009 - 2013 (Percent)

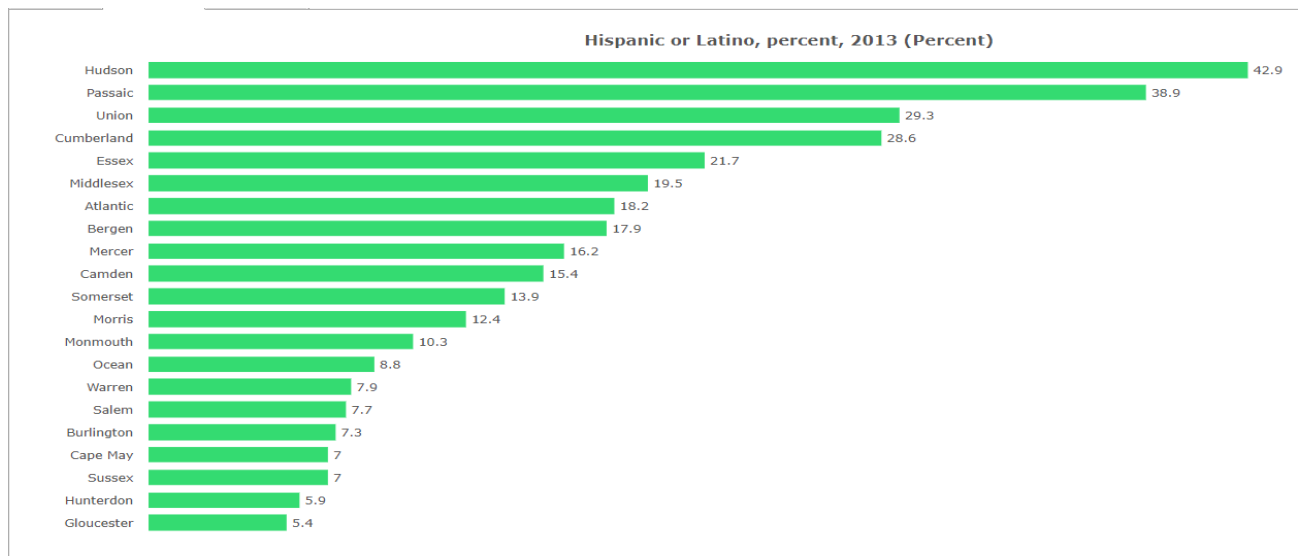


Figure 5: Hispanic or Latinos, 2013 (Percent)

Domestic Violence Policy Agenda:

No. 7 -- Culturally Sensitive Programs with Regards to Domestic Violence.

The importance of providing culturally and linguistically appropriate programming, noted in the previous recommendation, is critical to the victims of domestic violence at a time of crisis. Due to the fear induced by the recent political climate, Latinas are more likely to seek safety with community agencies such as the Hispanic Women's Resource Centers. However, such services are provided as in-kind services within HWRC programming. The Department of Children and Families should consider collaborating with the Centers to provide preventive and direct services with cultural competency to Latino communities across New Jersey.

The panelists reported that, unfortunately, domestic violence continues to be a common experience among women participating in the Hispanic Women's Resource Centers. Social science research has confirmed that Hispanic immigrant women are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence and less likely to seek help than White women. Latina immigrant women face unique challenges in breaking free from domestic violence. Specifically, the availability, affordability and, accessibility of services, as well as language and cultural needs, were all identified as commonly encountered barriers among panelists when working with women experiencing domestic violence. Panelists noted that the current hostility toward immigrants prevented women from accessing services due to fear of immigration raids in public service institutions. In addition, frontline staff frequently noted the many times that they served as the primary social support for these women. Agency staff shared countless stories of how the Hispanic Women's Resource Centers provided concrete services such as transportation to appointments, interpretation services, employment training, positive self-development, and information and referral. These are services that help Hispanic immigrant women become independent and reduce the risk of intimate partner violence.

No. 8 -- Additional Batterers Intervention Programs. Most programs focus on the victims of domestic violence but there was a broad consensus among the panelists that counseling for the batterer is vital for the sake of the children, the former partner, and society in general.

Panelists discussed the importance of addressing the needs of the entire family system in cases of domestic violence. In addition to the language barriers experienced by many Latinas, it was also noted that services for Latino men who commit domestic abuse that is linguistically accessible and culturally competent is limited. Many Hispanic immigrant women often hesitate to report spousal abuse for fear of the legal consequences for the offender and separating the family permanently with an arrest. The panelists called for additional prevention and intervention programming in Spanish for batterers.

No. 9 -- Additional Grade School and Middle School Programming Centered Around Domestic Violence.

. Outreach programs for youth should be included as part of the school curriculum to reduce the risk of repeating harmful family cycles of violence. By state law, school districts are required to offer programs to prevent dating violence, but there is little enforcement and often the program is not offered. Schools should develop guidelines on how they assess for domestic violence and this assessment should occur when there is violence between students. They should assess for the child's safety and offer resources to the student and abuser.

No. 10 -- Additional Transitional Housing for Undocumented Immigrants that are the Victims of Domestic Violence.

Current state programs offer only 30-60 days of transitional housing for the women who are in need of emergency shelter until transitional housing becomes available. However, women who are undocumented lack opportunities for continued supports to recover from a family crisis of this nature because they are ineligible for transitional services. Hispanic immigrant women would need more time to gather sufficient income to live independently after domestic abuse. It is important to note for policy makers and the general public that while the victim may be undocumented their children are often US citizens. Families of mixed immigration status are common. Transitional housing programs need to be expanded to cover, at a minimum, six months of assistance.

The panelists discussed their support of recommendations noted in the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board Annual Report 2018^{xiii}. The Annual Report 2018 reinforced the importance of continued training for law-enforcement, the judiciary, mental health and medical providers that is trauma-informed to increase understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence on victims with a particular understanding of the vulnerability of Hispanic immigrant women.

The fervent dream of the panelists is that one day the broken puzzle that is the United States immigration system will be cobbled back together by wise and compassionate legislators balancing human rights and security concerns in just the right proportion. Such a compromise has evaded Congress for more than 20 years. So far, it has been easier to target immigrants and blame them for the ills of our society than to find a way to incorporate them into the fabric of the nation.

There is no indication that the crisis of immigration will end any time soon so immigrants and their families will persevere. Latinas will continue to struggle every day to keep their families together despite the enormous challenges. These recommendations are a modest attempt to bridge the road from the uncertainty of today to a more optimistic tomorrow.

The Participants in the Roundtable were:

Lazaro Cardenas, Assistant Executive Director, Latino Action Network Foundation.

Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz, Executive Director, Latino Action Network Foundation.

Jessica M. Guzman, Staff Member, Domestic Violence Education & Awareness Program, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

Elaine Hewins, Coordinator, Domestic Violence Education & Awareness Program, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

Yocibel Mejia, MPA, Director of Operations, Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey, Inc.

Wendy Melendez, Division Director, Personal Development Division, La Casa de Don Pedro

Beatriz Oesterheld, Executive Director, Community Affairs and Resource Center.

Diana Tennant, Staff Member, Fulfill and Board Member of the Community Affairs Resource Center.

Jennifer Torres Del Valle, Program Director of Family Resource Center and Health Education Unit. Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey.

Carmen Vega, Consultant, Community Affairs and Resource Center.

Several clients participated in the Roundtable but their names have been omitted to protect their confidentiality.

This report was co-authored by Frank Argote-Freyre, Jesselly De La Cruz, and Lazaro Cardenas who served as facilitators at the Roundtable.

A Woman's Story



R.M. is a Mexican immigrant who came to the Hispanic Family Center for the English as a Second Language (ESL) program in October 2017. RM committed herself to learn and speak English fluently. She suffers from a traumatic past as she was abused by her mother and her husband. At the age of 15 she was forced into marriage as well as relocating to the United States; through this marriage, three children were born. R.M. utilized the Center's Domestic Violence Counseling program. In counseling she identified her lack of confidence, impatience, and difficulty in establishing bonds as major challenges in her life. When she first began she tested into the ESL Intermediate Level class and successfully advanced to the ESL Advanced Level. She has now completed the entire course and is functional in English.

In addition to language skills, R.M. was interested in acquiring job skills to enter the work place. Economic independence is important to her because she is raising three daughters on her own and she struggles to pay the bills. One of her daughters suffers from asthma and she wanted to learn how to provide basic preventive care. With these two goals in mind, R.M. enrolled in the computer training and the asthma prevention programs at the Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey in Camden.

The counseling sessions have helped her establish closer bonds with family members and friends. She is an active member at the center and now assists other women struggling with similar issues by sharing her story and experiences. R.M. believes the center has changed her life. Her training in asthma prevention has reduced her daughter's absences from school and there have been no hospital emergency room visits in many months. She currently holds two jobs, one at a restaurant and the other at a fitness center.

RM recently shared that *“currently, I am excelling and working every day on my emotional, physical and spiritual health as well as my responsibility as a mother. I seek to be a resilient person and to face the adversities and situations in my life. They are my motivation to move forward.”*

R.M. is an example of how the Centers can change a life.

Endnotes:

ⁱ <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/jun/06/what-you-need-know-about-trump-administrations-zer/>

ⁱⁱ For Sessions' June 11, 2018 ruling see: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1070866/download>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.newsday.com/long-island/nassau/hempstead-pizza-deliveryman-deportation-1.20077456>

^{iv} <https://www.njpp.org/reports/share-the-road-allowing-eligible-undocumented-residents-access-to-drivers-licenses-makes-sense-for-new-jersey>

^v The twelve states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.

^{vi} <https://www.nj.gov/state/chprd-about-director.shtml>

^{vii} <https://www.nj.gov/state/chprd-hispanic-fellows-program.shtml>

^{viii} See the DOW website. <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/women/index.html>

^{ix} <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NJ>

^x <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/state/nj/>

See NJ Department of Labor data:

^{xi} <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2017/hispanic-heritage.html>

^{xii} For 2000 Census figures see

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

For 2010 data see comparative data:

<http://censusviewer.com/state/NJ>

^{xiii} Intimate Partner Homicide in Immigrant Communities. (2018). New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board, Annual Report.