

October 7, 2011



Acting Assistant Secretary George Sheldon
Administration for Children and Families
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Sheldon,

On behalf of the tens of thousands of Latino children and families we serve, we the undersigned, together with the National Alliance for Hispanic Families, thank you for graciously hosting the meeting last week. The group you brought together was unique in that they are voices “from the field” who have tirelessly worked in and among Latino families in need. We are compelled to take action as for many years, even decades, our communities’ needs have been neglected. We recognize that you too are facing a series of challenges in your agency that are not of your own doing and that in many cases, have also been chronic challenges. We commend you for your willingness to take on these challenges, and we assure you that for the next 15 months we stand ready to work with you shoulder to shoulder to help ACF meet its mandates and to make an impact for the vulnerable in our country.

As explained more fully in the attached addendum, it is imperative for ACF to implement deliberate efforts that are focused on better serving and engaging the Hispanic community. Without this level of intentionality, ACF’s ability to equitably address the health and social needs of low income Hispanic children and families will never be realized but instead will deteriorate further as evidenced most recently in this week’s announcements in which ACF dramatically and disappointingly cut in half its Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood funding to organizations that primarily serve Hispanic populations. We find these actions unacceptable.

In our meeting last week, you asked for input on how ACF can improve its work with Hispanic communities. While we have been encouraged to lower our expectations, the challenges our communities face make it imperative that we aim high. Our communities deserve no less. To this end, we make 8 recommendations to you which are included in the attached. With the appropriate accountability measures, significant progress can be made in the next twelve months to implement and establish these recommendations within ACF.

We know you are only one person, and that your time at the helm of ACF may be limited. But we heard loud and clear your commitment to get the agency moving in the right direction regardless of time constraints. With your experienced leadership combined with the

political will, we believe that all of our recommendations can be implemented in a timely manner by federal staff who are held accountable for their implementation. If your legacy within ACF becomes one of inclusion and attention to a heretofore underserved and unrecognized population, we know that your efforts will result in a vote of confidence of this Administration's stated commitment to Hispanic communities.

Mr. Jose Villalobos, Senior Vice President of TELACU, has agreed to serve as our point of communication with your office. He may be reached at JVillalobos@TELACU.com or 323-506-2720. We look forward to hearing from you regarding the next steps in this dialogue.

Sincerely,

Dr. Etiony Aldorando
University of Miami

Dr. Alicia LaHoz
Family Bridges Chicago

Dr. Luis Torres
University of Houston

Dr. Alicia Diaz
Cuban American National Council

Elba Montalvo, Committee for
Hispanic Children and Families

Tadeo Saenz-Thompson
Washington State Migrant Council

Dr. Blanca Enriquez
El Paso Region 19

Virginia Madueno
City of Riverbank

Jose Villalobos
TELACU

Analco Gonzalez
Center for New Communities

Drs. Reyes and Colon-Padilla
Puerto Rican Family Services

Sylvia Zaldivar Sykes
Lake County Community Foundation

Carmen Joge
Congressional Hispanic Caucus
Institute

Dr. Anderson Torres
Puerto Rican Family Institute

cc 9/29/11 ACF Meeting Participants

Recommendations to the Administration for Children and Families to Improve Services to Hispanic Community

Recommendation #1: Target Use of Discretionary Funds

We recommend that ACF increase the amount of discretionary funding targeting Hispanic communities by releasing funding announcements with priority areas that are focused on Hispanic concerns and open to organizations with evidence of successfully serving Hispanic communities. Priority areas and funding levels can be justified by the demographic data that demonstrates unmet needs within the Hispanic community. These topics would include support for demonstration projects that propose culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and proven effective practices with Latino populations such as healthy marriage and relationship education, child abuse neglect prevention, prevention of out of home placement in foster care, foster care re-unification, teen pregnancy prevention, and domestic violence prevention and intervention. In addition, projects that look at underutilization by Latino youth of the runaway and homeless system should be an area of investigation.

In funding announcements that are exclusive to state government or agency competition, ACF should ensure that the needs of Hispanic communities and other emerging populations within those jurisdictions are not ignored but proportionally addressed. In their application, States should be required to provide detailed assurances of how funds will be allocated within the state, the eligibility of community and faith-based organizations serving Hispanic populations to compete for those funds, and the description of the culturally and linguistically appropriate services to be provided.

Recommendation #2: Fund Hispanic-focused Research

OPRE. Research projects focused on closing the gap on available information on a variety of ACF related program efforts and their role in the Latino community are essential. This would be accomplished by integrating members of the Hispanic Research Workgroup into the existing seven subject matter workgroups currently managed by OPRE. Further, research projects to address the above should be competed in such a way that allows for the full and fair participation of Hispanic-focused Research Centers throughout the country, who have up to now not received federal support.

Program Offices. In every area of programmatic endeavor within ACF, there is a need to significantly increase the knowledge and understanding of the impact, or lack thereof, of human service programming in Hispanic communities. To quickly fill this knowledge gap, each program office should be directed to announce and fund field-initiated research projects within a set of programmatic appropriate activities. This will generate potential best-practices and community-based strategies that have proven effective in each of these program areas, and ultimately increase our repertoire of evidence-based interventions targeting Hispanics.

Recommendation #3: Build Internal Awareness

Given the virtual absence of Hispanics within the ACF workforce nationally and regionally, there is a vacuum of experience and knowledgeable representation on the human service needs of the Hispanic community. Awareness of the Hispanic demographics and experience, and the importance of addressing Latino community concerns should be established within the agency. Efforts to increase the cultural competency of ACF staff must use experienced contractors who are intimately aware of conditions in the Latino community and can easily and quickly be engaged using the already established SBA 8a procurement process.

As part of this internal awareness training, we invite you and your team to see our communities because nothing surpasses the first-hand exposure to understand the need for action.

Recommendation #4: Diversify Review Panels

The broad and deep engagement of Hispanics on all ACF review panels is necessary. As you know, the review panels have significant influence on the funding of efforts in the community. Unfortunately, throughout the history of review panels, there has been virtually no participation of Hispanic reviewers. In our view, this is “low hanging fruit” that should be easy to implement but continues to get lost in a quagmire of bureaucracy for lack of leadership. Your personal leadership in re-addressing this grave failing is essential, and we were very encouraged by your outspoken support for this initiative during our meeting. Each program office head and their deputy should be required to ensure the inclusion of Hispanic reviewers. Program offices and contractors responsible for managing the review panels should be monitored for compliance and their efforts in placing a national call for Hispanic reviewers in all disciplines. In this effort, we are prepared to make initial recommendations of individuals who can be recruited as reviewers in this process.

Recommendation # 5: Expand Accessibility Initiative

The Accessibility Initiative proved to be a successful strategy as a first step to turn the tide of decades of neglect of the Hispanic community. While you are reticent about sole source contracts, we know that where warranted, this is a normal course of business throughout the federal government, including HHS. Given that that SBA 8a program allows such arrangements, and that the existing contractor has the unique combination of the experience and knowledge of both the Hispanic community and ACF, we encourage you to re-consider your position and reinstate the existing contract. We believe that because of the urgency of time, and the dearth of success ACF has in serving the largest population of poor children and their families in the country, this contract should not only be allowed to continue the work began last year but to expand into a more robust manner.

Recommendation #6: Fill Workforce Vacancies with Experience in Hispanic Communities

As stated in our meeting, the abysmal representation of Hispanics within the ACF workforce relative to the civilian labor force has a far-reaching negative impact. This finding is supported by a recent report from OPM that found HHS to have the worst representation of Hispanics among all federal agencies. We understand that ACF's data is virtually identical to

that of the entire HHS agency workforce of HHS at 3.3% of its workforce. fall in last place among its To this end, we recommend that any vacancies be announced for no less than 30 days on a nationwide basis, with specific and targeted efforts to inform Hispanic serving schools of higher education as well as national, regional, and local community organizations the day the announcement is published. Secondly, given the absence of knowledge and experience within ACF of the Hispanic community, all current and future announcements should contain as a selected factor the awareness, understanding, and experience of human and social needs in the Hispanic community. This effort will build ACF's internal capacity to appropriately and effectively address the human service needs in our country.

Recommendation #7: Utilize Performance Plans

As evidenced by the implementation in the last 6 months of the Hispanic Research Workgroup by the Director of the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation, performance plans are essential for ensuring action on specific outcomes. Consequently, each of our recommendations should be included in the performance plans of ACF Program office heads, their deputies, and appropriate Division directors. Further, progress on these performance plan elements should be reviewed by the ACF leadership on a quarterly basis to ensure timely attention.

Recommendation #8: Appoint Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration to Lead Hispanic Efforts

To implement any of our recommendations, seasoned, experienced civil service leadership is required. This individual will report to you on the progress of these above recommendations and provide day-to-day, coordination among the various departments within ACF. To this end, we recommend the appointment of the Deputy Assistant Secretary (DASA) for Administration to serve in this capacity. In addition to overseeing the accomplishment of the above recommendations, the DASA can ensure that the appropriate staff coordinate the quarterly reconvening as we discussed in our meeting.

Rationale for Focus on Hispanic Communities

The Hispanic community faces a number of chronic challenges that cannot be addressed without the focused and effective deployment of federal resources to areas of greatest need. Both quantitative data and anecdotal experiences reflect the fact that without a paradigm shift in the way our federal government directs its resources, the unmet needs of the Hispanic population will cripple our country. We recognize that many diverse communities have multiple and complex needs, and we do not wish for the focus on Hispanic communities to come at the expense of other communities. At the same time, the data speaks for itself, and Hispanics are disproportionately and adversely impacted by the very issues ACF is charged with addressing. As noted in the Washington Post headline article the morning we met, Hispanic children are the largest group of children living in poverty. With this, the out of wedlock birthrates for Hispanics are climbing while others are declining. The rate of entry of Latino children into foster care has continued to increase over the last ten years while other groups remain the same. These and other similarly unfortunate facts compel us to seek out focused attention and resources specifically on the Hispanic community. Indeed, focusing on Hispanics is not just a moral imperative or a political mandate; it is an economic necessity. Hispanics are the largest and still the fastest growing demographic in the country. With a median age of 27, Hispanics already form a large segment of our workforce and will continue to make up an increasingly larger share in the decades to come. As the fortunes of Hispanics go, so will the fate of our country. The issues that cripple the Hispanic family will also cripple our economy.

The Administration is to be congratulated for making efforts to place Hispanic political operatives in federal government. This could have long-term benefits as these young professionals gain experience in the decades to come, however, their tenure is short and as such, they will be unable to have the lasting presence to affect the systemic change necessary for the full participation of the Hispanic community. The most recent example of this is the Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood funding that was announced this week. While the RFP states that ACF reserves the right to consider preferences to fund organizations serving emerging, unserved, or under-served populations, it appears that this option was not exercised, as organizations with a stellar track record of providing relationship and marriage education in primarily Hispanic communities were not funded. The result was a decrease of almost 50% in funding directed to organizations that are intentionally, and successfully, focused on serving Hispanic populations. While Hispanic children account for nearly 40% of all poor children, ACF awarded only 5% of this TANF supported program to Hispanic communities. Sadly, this was a recapitulation of last year's pregnancy prevention grant awards. Hispanic have the highest rates of adolescent pregnancies, and less than five awards of more than one hundred were made to organizations intentionally and successfully focused on serving primarily Hispanic adolescents.