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The State of Latinos in Los Angeles County: Recognizing Their Importance and Addressing Disparities

Los Angeles County is home to over 4.7 million Latinos, who constitute the largest ethnic group in the region and, for generations, have played a crucial role in shaping the County’s cultural, economic, and social landscape¹ . Latino culture enriches every aspect of the County, from music and dance to food and art. Furthermore, Latinos are a key driver of LA County’s economic growth and an important source of economic strength and resilience. According to a report by California Lutheran University, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Latino business sector in Los Angeles County would be larger than the GDPs of states such as Louisiana and Oregon.²

Despite their immense contributions, Latinos in Los Angeles County continue to face significant disparities in several key areas including education, health, economic

¹<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/epi/docs/2021-LAC-Population-8RE.pdf>
² https://www.clucerf.org/files/2023/01/001_LosAngelesMetro_Fienup.pdf

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well-being, housing, literacy, and access to green spaces.

Latino students experience lower high school graduation rates and college enrollment compared to their peers in other racial and ethnic groups. In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), Latino students are falling significantly behind their White counterparts in academic performance. Only 35.33% of Latino students meet English proficiency standards, compared to 65.4% of White students. In math, 24.29% of Latino students are proficient compared to 54.97% of White students.³ According to the Alliance for Better Communities, this educational disparity not only restricts their access to higher-paying jobs but also prevents opportunities for career advancement. The need for qualified early childhood educators is critical in addressing these gaps, as early education experiences significantly influence long term academic success. By investing in early childhood education and supporting educators, the County can better prepare Latino children for future academic challenges. Ultimately, these efforts are essential for breaking cycles of poverty and inequality, enabling Latino families to achieve a greater socioeconomic status⁴.

Latinos have continuously faced chronic health care inequities, including routine and preventative care, mental health, and wellness resources. These disparities can be made worse when there's a shortage of culturally competent healthcare providers and Spanish speaking medical professionals.⁵

According to a 2019 report by the United States Census Bureau, over 761,000

³ /<https://www.chapman.edu/communication/demographics-policy/el-futuro-es-latino-2024.pdf>

⁴ https://afabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ABC_2021_Latino-Scorecard_081621.pdf

⁵ https://afabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ABC_2021_Latino-Scorecard_081621.pdf

Latinos in the County were living below the poverty level. Additionally, one in four Latino households in Los Angeles County earned less than \$40,000 per year. A significant contributing factor would be that Latino households are increasingly becoming rent burdened. 54% of Latino households in 2019 were rent burdened and 26% were considered severely rent burdened.⁶ The County must work towards a plan that promotes economic prosperity and ensures that families have well paying jobs that promote the wellbeing of Latino residents.

According to LA County's Department of Public Health (DPH), 53% of adults in the County have low literacy levels which affects not only their ability to access and understand County services, but also their ability to navigate their communities safely.⁷ For Latinos with low literacy levels, understanding street signs or wayfinding systems can be a daily challenge, turning what should be straightforward tasks into confusing and stressful experiences.

According to LA County Department of Parks and Recreation's 2016 Countywide Park Needs Assessment, of all major metro areas, the LA region has the least amount of accessible park space. Unfortunately, the problem is worse for predominantly Latino communities. The recognized standard is 4 acres of parks for every 1,000 people. However, in Los Angeles County, Latino communities have just 0.6 acres for every 1,000 residents.⁸ The lack of parks and green spaces not only limits opportunities for physical activity and outdoor gatherings but also denies these communities the

⁶ [ABC 2021 Latino-Scorecard 081621.pdf \(afabc.org\)](#)

⁷ [LA County Public Health - Health Education Administration](#)

⁸ [Park and Equity Facts](#)

environmental and mental health benefits that green spaces provide such as cooler temperatures. According to LA County's Climate Vulnerability Assessment, Latino communities make up 66.9% of the population living in communities with high vulnerability to extreme heat.

According to the 2022 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, the number of Latinos experiencing homelessness increased by 26%. In 2024, despite an overall decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness, the number of Latinos experiencing homelessness continued to increase, now making up 43% of the unhoused population in the County.⁹ The County in partnership with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) has been studying the issue of increasing homelessness among Latinos for the last two years. A report with recommendations on the matter is forthcoming.

The Board of Supervisor's efforts to reduce disparities amongst the Latino community are not new. In February 2022, the Board approved a motion *Solidifying the Role of Promotoras de Salud in County Services*. Promotoras play a vital role in Los Angeles County's efforts to expand access to care and connect residents to resources in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. Later that year, in response to the staggering increase in the number of Latinos experiencing homelessness, the Board unanimously approved a motion to address the increase of unhoused Latinos in Los Angeles County. This augmented previous Board-directed work to better serve immigrants and undocumented individuals who are experiencing homelessness. In

⁹ <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=968-lahsa-takes-action-to-address-latino-homelessness>

August 2023, the Board requested that the Department of Mental Health (DMH) develop a strategic plan and outreach campaign focusing on the system of hiring and retaining bilingual and Spanish-speaking clinicians.

In addition to these efforts, the County must continue to work on developing a more strategic and comprehensive plan to address the challenges Latino residents face on a day- to-day basis. While past initiatives have helped highlight the need to better address disparities, without a more targeted approach, the existing disparities in education, health, economic opportunity, and housing will persist.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Office (CEO) through the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative to allocate appropriate funding to and commission a study on the status of Latino residents in LA County.
2. Request the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) to coordinate with school districts to develop a set of recommendations to improve literacy and increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates among Latino students, and report back in writing in 90 days.
3. Direct the Chief Executive Office's Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations (CEO-LAIR) branch, to support State legislative policies that stress the importance of investing in early childhood education in underserved Latino communities within Los Angeles County.
4. Direct the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to report back in writing in 90 days to the Board on Medi-Cal enrollment and disenrollment rates of

Latinos countywide and enrollment rates for CalFresh and cash aid programs (including services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness).

5. Direct the Department of Public Works, in collaboration with the Department of Public Health, and the Chief Executive Office (CEO) through the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative, to review resident comprehension of street signs and other public service announcements in neighborhoods with high Latino and Spanish-speaking households, and report back in writing in 90 days with recommendations on how to improve constituent comprehension, including considering the addition of Spanish to County wayfinding and street signs and use of universal symbols.
6. Direct the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) and the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of programs aimed at increasing economic mobility, entrepreneurship, business success, and financial literacy in neighborhoods with high Latino populations. This includes programs for working families including Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation, compact mobile food operations, and union apprenticeships for pipeline into good paying jobs. The departments should prepare a detailed report in writing in 90 days that includes:
 - a. An inventory of all programs designed to enhance economic mobility, entrepreneurship, business success, and financial literacy, including whether and how the programs are tailored for or accessible to Latino communities.

- b. An overview on union apprenticeship programs as pathways to well-paying careers. The report should include recommendations for strengthening these pathways for Latinos.
 - c. A breakdown of programs and services offered in Spanish.
 - d. Utilization rates of Spanish-language programs compared to their English counterparts.
 - e. Key program outcomes and an assessment of the effectiveness of these programs in reaching and serving Spanish-speaking residents and businesses.
 - f. Recommendations for improving the accessibility, effectiveness, and outreach of Spanish-language offerings, considering the specific needs of Latino entrepreneurs and community members.
7. Direct Public Works, in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation, to review multimodal access to open spaces, parks, and recreational opportunities in predominately Latino communities, with an emphasis on those communities identified as high needs in the 2016 Parks Needs Assessment, and report back in writing in 90 days. The report back should discuss deficits in pedestrian, cyclist, and transit access to green space, and identify non-County funding opportunities to improve equitable access.
8. Direct the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) in collaboration with CEO to conduct an economic analysis of the factors driving the increased cost of living for Latino communities in the County and report back in writing in 90 days. This

analysis should identify and prioritize key economic factors contributing to rising costs, evaluate existing cost-neutral programs or policies implemented by other counties or municipalities that have successfully addressed similar challenges, and provide cost-neutral policy recommendations for the County to address these drivers, including housing affordability, transportation costs, access to education and job training, healthcare expenses, and food security.

9. Direct LA County's Registrar Recorder / County Clerk Department to report back in writing in 90 days on recommendations to increase voter participation within the Latino community.

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