

**TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON 2014-2015
EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL
Higher Education Hearing - February 6, 2014**

Hello, my name is José Davila and I am Vice President for Policy and Government Relations with the Hispanic Federation. I am joined by my colleague, Jessica Guzman, Director of Education. Chairs Farrell, DeFrancisco, Glick, LaValle and members of the respective committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of our Latino community partners and the disenfranchised students they serve.

Hispanic Federation is the premier Latino membership organization in the nation founded to address the many inequities confronting Latinos and the nonprofits which serve them. For more than 20 years, Hispanic Federation has provided grants, administered human services and coordinated advocacy for our broad network of agencies that serve more than 2 million Latinos in areas of health, immigration, economic empowerment, civic engagement and, of course, education.

I'd like to briefly turn our testimony over to Jessica Guzmán to discuss recommendations from a recently-released report on Latino college success.

Why New York Should Invest in Higher Education Programs

As the youngest and fastest growing community, Latinos represent – in many ways – the hope and promise of New York State. However, the continuing failure of our educational system to prepare Latino youth for college threatens the future prosperity of the Latino community and the state as a whole.

- Studies show that just 23 percent of Latino New Yorkers between 25 and 64 years old had at least a two-year college degree, compared to 52 percent of whites.
- In NYC, more specifically, a mere 59% of Latinos graduate high school and only 15% are deemed college ready.
- Of the students who enroll in community college, 79% require remedial course work that exhausts their financial aid resources and valuable time.
- In fact, we know that after 6 years of college, only 49.2% of Latino students graduate with a bachelor's degree and, more upsetting, just 26% obtain their associate's degree.

This educational gap is startling and requires immediate action. The Fiscal Year '15 Budget should invest in high-quality education programs that will make a significant difference in whether students drop out or graduate from college. This is especially the case for Latino and other low-income students who enter college with significant gaps in their education, work demands and other socio-economic concerns.

Latino College Success

Hispanic Federation is a leading partner in a newly formed coalition focused on increasing Latino college success. The Latino CREAR Coalition - CREAR stands for College Readiness, Access & Retention

– recently released the policy blueprint you have in front of you. The blueprint lays out numerous recommendations ranging from early childhood to higher education retention.

With regard to the FY'15 Budget, the report strongly urges the state to invest in higher education support programs for academically at-risk students. Some of these include the City University of New York's (CUNY) **Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), Single Stop and CUNY Start** – all examples of effective programs focused on supporting students towards greater and timelier college completion. We urge the state to increase funding to these programs so many more students will benefit from such excellent retention models.

The FY '15 Budget should also look into supporting innovative initiatives that have shown true promise in advancing college success. Hispanic Federation and CUNY's **CREAR Futuros/Creating Futures Peer Mentoring Program**, for example, has worked to increase the graduation rates of almost 1,000 Latino college students by providing direct place-based support systems, including mentoring, academic tutoring, leadership development trainings, internship opportunities, and connections to partnering CBO programs and services. CREAR Futuros works to increase retention rates by 40%, course completion levels by 25%, and graduation rates 40% higher than current levels. The program is currently on 3 CUNY Campuses – Lehman, John Jay and LaGuardia – and we recommend the state provide funding to expand this initiative to all CUNY and possibly SUNY campuses.

I will now turn our testimony back to José Davila to briefly discuss the New York State DREAM Act.

NYS DREAM Act (A2597A/S2378B)

Hispanic Federation is concerned about the Executive Budget's failure to again include the **New York State DREAM Act**. For the last 3 years, the Federation has been a leading voice and organizer rallying support for this bill so that our Latino and immigrant youth can achieve the American Dream.

We thank Speaker Silver, Chair Glick, lead sponsor Francisco Moya and the Assembly for passing and funding the DREAM Act last year. We also thank Senator Peralta for his leadership. If passed, the DREAM Act would expand the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to all students who qualify for aid, regardless of immigration status. The legislation would also create the DREAM Fund, a private scholarship fund for children of immigrants, and allow access to 529 accounts.

Two separate analyses by the State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli and the Fiscal Policy Institute calculated an annual cost of \$20 million and \$17 million, respectively, which represents only two percent of current expenditures for TAP. Moreover, a worker in New York holding a bachelor's degree earns an average of \$25,000 more per year than their counterparts who only have a high school diploma and therefore contribute an additional \$3,900 each year in taxes to state and local governments. It is clear that by investing in our youth, New York can continue to position itself as one of the largest economies in the world, while reaping the benefits of increased economic productivity and increased tax revenues.

Including the DREAM Act in the final state budget makes fiscal sense and will help children and families living in each of your districts.

Thank you for your time and attention to these important issues. It is our hope that making these investments in the final FY' 15 Budget will improve Latino college access, retention and graduation rates – regardless of immigration status - and build a stronger New York for us all.