

Draft of testimony statement:

Thank you for this opportunity to share the needs of our Suffolk County, East End community as it struggles through this devastating Covid 19 Crisis.

My name is Minerva Perez and I am the Executive Director of OLA of Eastern Long Island. OLA was founded in 2002 to support Latino members of our community while we work together to create a safer, healthier, and more equitable East End.

Our pillars of focus center on Advocacy and Education. As we succeed so does our full region. During the month of April we were able to meet the needs of 9 school districts to supply \$700,000 worth of chromebooks for distance learning along with the wifi needed for some families. This was not a "Latino only" effort. It was a way to fully express our belief that anytime any student is deprived of access to education, our full community suffers.

As OLA has been the only Latino focused non profit based on the East End of Long Island, we are poised to speak directly to the disproportionate effect this crisis has had on Latinos; as recent immigrants, as citizens, and as members of mixed status families.

Our isolated region, while a scenic and coveted destination point for the wealthy, is home to a glaring disparity of service industry workers, many of whom are Latino, called upon to insure the economic growth and viability of our region.

This crisis has taken a sledgehammer to the already faulty systems that have not caught up with our region's 30 year old demographic shift showing growth of Latino population to be 20-25%. Our 24 East End school districts have - on a low average - 50% Latino student body. This crisis is showing the many ways Latino members of our shared community are being disproportionality ravaged. I offer these insights with hopes to assist in creating solutions, not to point fingers of blame. We recognize the many ways the offices of the Governor and the Attorney General have sought to meet the needs of our most vulnerable and hardest hit community members. We thank you.

Healthcare messaging and info at the start of the crisis did not adequately take into consideration the Spanish speaking members of the community held in limbo with no clear guidance leading to greater levels of spread. Once testing was finally established, lack of transportation to and from testing, fears related to cost and collection of data, fears related to SNAP all slowed down testing and treatment of covid positive community members- leading, without a doubt, to greater spread within the community. Worker safety in essential jobs such as restaurant kitchens and landscaping sites is hard to oversee and with lacking incentive to stay home due to "essential" jobs status more workers are compelled to work rather than stay home.

Public (k-12) education made the best of this new distance learning shift but the lack of communication and access to Latino parents means that many students are either not reachable or harder to maintain contact with. Beyond loss of education, there is also the mental health component our students are dealing with. Students are struggling with heightened fears of loss of housing, lack of food, anxiety and isolation. Without the benefit of schools having eyes on the student, we are looking at collateral damage of great magnitude. We don't need to wait for self-harm, addiction, suicide related deaths or injuries to escalate to know this is a concern.

Latino students and other teens are needing access to mental health, possibly telemental health contracts should be considered.

Immigrant and mixed status families need better access to police protection and victim services. Domestic violence reporting is up 30% in NY State. As a former domestic violence shelter director, I know the critical importance of communication with law enforcement at the moment they arrive at a home. We need enhanced communications such as cell phones in every patrol car with access to language line to ensure that law enforcement has the ability to fully communicate, build trust and learn the specifics of crimes and threats to best support victims and families.

Food is one of our largest crisis points- specifically reaching homebound Latino community members. Illness, compromised immune systems of the chronically ill, quarantine, small children out of school, no transportation, sudden loss of income are contributing to how "homebound" needs to be defined. More support for county/town efforts to make food deliveries is needed.

Housing threats and displacement are tearing up our once thriving workforce and their families. Shuffling students from one district to the next and back again will hurt districts and students. More support for landlords to ease burden on renters would help along with other approaches.

Unemployment assistance to navigate resources for all workers unable to go back to their jobs is needed.

Public transportation in Suffolk county is gravely lacking. We need ways to safely and consistently transport members of our community to jobs, healthcare, education, etc so that further economic and health related devastation doesn't escalate needlessly.

OLA thanks you for holding this hearing. We are hopeful that you will call upon us again to assist you in all ways possible. This is a hard time for all. Let's give NY State the best opportunity to survive and thrive together.