

Testimony re:

Exploring solutions to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minority communities.

Submitted to

NYS Senate and Assembly Joint Committees on Cities, Health, Labor, Local Government, Women's Issues; Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus; Asian Pacific American Task Force; Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force; and Task Force on Women's Issues.

Submitted by

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Good morning. My name is Frankie Miranda and I am the President of Hispanic Federation. I would like to thank all of the chair people here for bringing us together today to discuss possible solutions to ensure minority communities receive equitable and adequate resources to fight the damaging impact that COVID-19 is having on communities of color.

The COVID-19 virus is laying bare the devastating racial and ethnic inequalities that hover over our state. The legacy of structural discrimination – highly segregated and unequal public education, substandard housing and healthcare, grinding poverty – are putting our people most at risk of catching and dying from this virus.

For us to finally come out ahead of this pandemic, we must incorporate community into all efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 and repair the destruction it has caused. The two areas that I will focus on today are supporting local community-based organizations (CBOs) and ensuring culturally and linguistically competent contact tracing. Both topics have incredible potential to help uplift communities of color during this crisis.

### **Supporting Local Community-Based Organizations**

Hispanic Federation's network of 150+ Latino community-based organizations are front-line service providers for our neighborhoods and communities. The work they are doing today – and are committed to doing over the coming weeks and months – will be essential for us to get through this public health crisis.

If we are to effectively address this unprecedented crisis in Latino neighborhoods, we must make sure that Latino community-based organizations are front and center when it comes to resource allocation and interventions directed at our state's most affected populations. It is imperative that resource allocation is proportionate to the harm COVID-19 caused on the community. CBO's serving neighborhoods that have been devastated by the health crisis will naturally require a greater amount of resources than others to adequately serve their community members in recovery efforts. Our nonprofits are deeply embedded in our neighborhoods, providing frontline health and human services to millions of Latino New Yorkers. They also serve as economic engines, employing tens of thousands of people.

Since day one, nonprofits felt the brunt of the harmful economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic while providing services to those most effected by the current health crisis. Our underfunded and over stretched organizations are working night and day to provide for communities of color across New York. Due to overwhelming needs within their communities, they've begun providing services that they were never built to provide. Day laborer centers have become food distributors, immigration service providers are assisting people with unemployment applications, and the list goes on. Our agencies have quickly adapted to provide direct services with minimal contact and minimal resources (funding and personal protective equipment (PPE)) and when society can once again convene, our organizations will be on the front lines helping people rebuild their lives.

As president of Hispanic Federation, I have had numerous conversations with executive directors who are on the verge of closing their doors – organizations that have been pillars within their communities for decades. As trusted organizations, they effectively serve the most vulnerable populations in our city and keep millions of our residents afloat financially, socially and mentally. New York's nonprofits provide families with food and clothing, help people gain skills to become employed, help homeless families find shelter, assist families in obtaining health insurance and maintain healthy lifestyles, and provide countless other services that are heavily relied upon. In short, nonprofits make our communities stronger not only by providing needed services but also by serving as engines of economic activity.

Not only are our nonprofits crucial to the social well-being of the city, but we also play a substantial role in the city's economy. Nonprofits alone account for 16% of the private workforce, compared to 10% nationally. The community-based organizations we proudly represent employ thousands of professionals and support staff across the entire state: from social workers and immigration lawyers to after-school program staff and health navigators.

As the COVID-19 unemployment crisis grows, New York must work to protect nonprofits and save critical service providers from succumbing to the economic downfall experienced in the past. The 2008 Great Recession caused America's nonprofit sector to suffer, especially those smaller nonprofits that are critical service providers within their communities. In fact, between 2008 and

2010, 13.5% of the nation's public charities closed. We must learn from the past and make sure the same mistakes are not made again.

### **Ensuring Cultural and Linguistic Competent Outreach for Contact Tracing**

If done correctly, contact tracing also has the potential to uplift communities of color. Scientists and medical professionals have used testing and contact tracing to control infectious diseases for decades. This strategy was particularly impactful in the fight against Ebola. While quarantining was found to be effective in containing the disease, success was directly dependent on testing and contact tracing. Additionally, testing and contact tracing has been a pivotal approach to limit the spread of HIV by notifying partners of those who have tested positive and encouraging them to get tested as well. Contact tracing coupled with testing is the most promising approach to identifying new infections and preventing further infection.

However, for contact tracing to work in communities of color across New York, community members must be able to trust and confide in contact tracers. When speaking with COVID-19 positive individuals, contact tracers are collecting the name and information of everyone that individual has come into contact with – potentially including undocumented relatives or friends illegally subletting apartments. To have effective, accurate and candid conversations with community members, contact tracers must have cultural and linguistic competency appropriate for the local community. For these reasons, it is imperative that contact tracers come directly from the communities they are working in.

Community-based organizations are an invaluable resource to contact tracing programs. With deep roots in their communities, CBOs must receive funding to create capacity to share their expertise as pillars within their neighborhoods. CBOs have specialized information gained from years of direct work with community and can assist with a multitude of aspects comprising a contact tracing program, such as disseminating outreach information, quality employee recruitment, and the development of a culturally competent script for contact tracers. If we are to effectively address this unprecedented crisis in minority communities across New York, we must ensure sure that local CBOs are working hand in hand with any institution or agency leading this effort.

Moreover, wide-spread public education campaigns will be crucial to the effectiveness of any contact tracing program. Community members must have a basic knowledge of why contact tracing is important, why they should engage in conversation with contact tracers, and how to identify credible contact tracers. Ethnic media partners are highly trusted and reputable sources of information for communities of color and must be activated to provide critical information to encourage community members to divulge necessary information to contact tracers.

Hispanic Federation is here to serve and is happy to work with the New York State legislature to protect communities of color across New York and do everything possible to win the war against COVID-19. Thank you for your time.