



## STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

*Legislando*

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## PUSHING FOR INCLUSIVE STATE SERVICES FOR THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY

By Sen. Leo Jaramillo (NM), NHCSL Media and Culture Task Force Vice-Chair

In recent years, the Hispanic and immigrant communities in the United States have continued to face major obstacles in accessing vital services. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted some of these obstacles, particularly regarding access to healthcare and public health information and guidance, as well as accessibility to enrollment in the public education system. These issues are leaving non-English speaking families in the US behind, denying them basic rights. Legislators and policymakers, both state and federal, must prioritize addressing this situation to ensure compliance with civil rights laws and to promote equity, civic participation, and trust in public institutions.

Of the over 22 million people in the US with limited English proficiency, close to two thirds are Hispanic, and as Hispanic communities continue to grow, it is important for the federal and state governments to provide more accessible services to non-English speakers in our country. Language barriers mean that a massive number of families across the country miss out on essential government services such as healthcare, education, and courts. This issue isn't just about language, it's about dignity and equal opportunity.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Spanish speakers were unable to access critical public health information including vaccination, which left the Hispanic population disproportionately uninformed. This disparity highlights a persistent issue: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires "meaningful access" to state services, but in many cases, compliance is inconsistent. Currently, some

state agencies across the country fail to provide information and forms in multiple languages, and schools lack sufficient bilingual staff, among other issues.

New Mexico may not carry a formal bilingual mandate, but the state continues to honor its heritage by ensuring vital information reaches New Mexicans in both English and Spanish. And states like California and New York have established comprehensive language access laws requiring translation of forms and interpreter services. California passed Government Code §11135, which draws heavily from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, requiring that all individuals have full access to the services provided by state agencies. In New York, the state provides access for the top 12 non-English languages spoken, and New York City provides interpretation for over 100 languages.

Another positive advancement in offering multilingual government services is that, until now, Medicaid has been very active in providing services for its non-English speakers, mainly those who speak Spanish. Barring Alaska, forty-nine states translate online applications and documents on the Medicaid website. However, there are still noticeable gaps in accessibility, with most translated information being seen as less reliable than the information in English, and most translations taking only Spanish speakers into account.

State legislators should focus on requiring agencies to translate their websites, as well as essential documents into the most common non-English languages, similar to New York's top 12 languages policy. In addition to this, legislators should advocate and push for funding interpreter services,

as well as partnering with local groups that focus on serving LEP communities within their respective districts. It's important to stress that these policies should be done to offer Hispanic constituents a fair experience in dealing with and seeking assistance from state agencies.

Section 202-A of the New York Executive Law, Language Translation Services, provides a good framework for new, similar legislation in other states. By using data that appears in the most recent American Community Survey published by U.S. Census Bureau, states can designate how many languages can be used for state websites. Some states may not need a top twelve, but rather a smaller amount that more accurately accounts for their LEP population. NHCSL's own Res. 2021-09, Making State Legislatures More Accessible to America's Diverse Population by Increasing Translation and Interpretation Services in Our State Capitols, establishes several terms for the breaking down of language barriers for our communities and highlights the advancements made already in several states. The aforementioned law and this resolution give policymakers a framework for legislation that can create accessibility and provide resources for our communities across the country.

Legislators across the Nation would benefit greatly from pushing for better access to resources for individuals with LEP, as this would bring in more individuals to participate in civic life and duty, as well as give legislators more insight into the problems and needs of their constituents and communities.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Familia,

Next month, our Caucus is convening in Oklahoma City for our 23rd Annual Summit.

This year, besides voting for our resolutions during the Annual Meeting, we will also elect our organization's new leadership, who will serve alongside President-Elect Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT).

As I conclude my tenure as your President, I want to take a moment to reflect on the work we have done together and my hopes for the future. From coming together in favor of better immigration policies, to investing in our health equity work through the Quad Caucus, and navigating two years of very difficult legislative sessions, my time as President has been filled with unprecedented challenges both for our organization and our communities. But I have also seen each and every one of you take a step forward for your constituents by showing up, introducing legislation, reaching consensus and working every single day to make their lives better. And that, at the end of the day, is what public service really is about.

I look forward to seeing you all in Oklahoma next month. This will be my final convening as your President, and I'm truly excited to celebrate with you, reflect on all that we've accomplished together and pass the torch to the new NHCSL leadership during our Noche de Celebración.

Respectfully,

Rep. Angela Romero (UT)



## NHCSL JOINS MALC PANEL ON IMMIGRATION, POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AND LATINO LEADERSHIP

At MALC's Annual 2025 gathering in San Antonio, the Mexican American Legislative Caucus (MALC) hosted the panel *Latino Lawmakers in Action: Insights into Leading the Charge, Building Power and Shaping Policy*, highlighting how Hispanic legislators are shaping policy, building political power, and uplifting their communities. NHCSL proudly joined the discussion to support MALC's ongoing mission as the oldest and largest caucus of Hispanic state legislators in the U.S.

Moderated by Rep. Ramon Romero (TX), chair of MALC, the panel featured NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT), NHCSL Vice President for Public Policy Sen. Cristina Castro (IL), Sen. Michael Brooks-Jimenez, and Sen. Carlos Guillermo Smith (FL). Panelists discussed the challenges and opportunities of serving as Latino state legislators, focusing on immigration, political violence, and redistricting. They spoke of both the harmful impacts of certain policies and the resilience of Latino communities confronting these issues, while sharing insights on strategies for building lasting political power.

"Across every state, Latino lawmakers are proving that leadership rooted in service and unity can overcome any divide. Our work together is about building lasting power that delivers for our communities, strengthens our democracy, and ensures Latino voices are shaping the future of this country," said MALC Chair State Rep. Ramón Romero, Jr.

NHCSL Executive Director Kenneth Romero praised Latino lawmakers nationwide who have risked their political careers to defend democracy. He emphasized that protecting Hispanic, Black, and other marginalized communities transcends party politics, with solidarity and unity at the heart of effective leadership.

The panel reinforced NHCSL's mission to amplify Hispanic voices in policymaking and offered valuable insights into the power and influence of Latino legislators, inspiring current and future leaders and advocates working to strengthen their communities. Latino lawmakers are leading, uniting, and shaping the future of state policy.



From top left: NHCSL's Executive Director Kenneth Romero; Latino Lawmakers in Action: Insights into Leading the Charge, Building Power and Shaping Policy Panel; members of the audience; MALC's Jacqueline Arias-Bryant, Monserrat García Rodríguez and Mercedes Molinawith NHCSL's Patricia Meza and Kenneth Romero. Credit: NHCSL.



# NHCSL HOSTS SUMMER MEETING IN BOSTON ALONGSIDE NCSL'S 50TH ANNUAL SUMMIT

NHCSL gathered in Boston for its 2025 Summer Executive Committee and BBA Meeting, held concurrently with the National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) 50th Annual Legislative Summit. The event brought together Hispanic state legislators from across the country for two days of policy discussions, networking, and leadership development.

NHCSL's programming offered members opportunities to engage on emerging policy topics and strengthen connections within the broader legislative community. President-Elect Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT) opened the sessions with a discussion

on meeting the energy demand created by artificial intelligence while reducing pollution, featuring Avangrid Deputy CEO Kimberly Harriman and Casey Bowers of the Environmental League of Massachusetts Action Fund. Attendees also participated in a bilingual media training with Dewey Square Principal and CNN commentator Maria Cardona, gaining skills to effectively communicate on behalf of their communities.

Day two featured a conversation on the evolving vaccine landscape, moderated by Sen. Gustavo Rivera (NY), followed by presentations from Massachusetts biotech leaders on the role of state policy in growing

innovation and improving public health.

During the Executive Committee Meeting, members advanced several resolutions addressing education, public safety, and community health, including an emergency resolution on gun violence prevention. U.S. Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts closed the programming part of the meeting with keynote remarks and a candid discussion on issues affecting communities of color nationwide.

That evening, NHCSL co-hosted a reception with live music alongside the Latino members of the Massachusetts Black and Latino Caucus.



From top left: Sen. Michael Brooks-Jimenez and Rep. Arturo Alonso-Sandoval of Oklahoma; Casey Bowers of the Environmental League of Massachusetts and Avangrid's Kim Harriman; Sen. Adam Gomez (MA), Scott McGoonan of Vertex, and Ben Bradford of MassBio; Sen. Gustavo Rivera (NY), Dr. Glory Ruiz of the Boston Medical Center, Vaccinate Your Family's Amy Pisan, Michele Slafkosky of Families Fighting Flu and Northe Saunders of Safe Communities Coalition and American Families for Vaccines. Credit: NHCSL.



From bottom left: U.S. Senator Ed Markey (MA); NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT) and President-Elect Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT) greeting Senator Markey; Senator Markey delivering remarks; Rep. Andy Vargas (MA) introducing Senator Markey.

Center: Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT), Senator Ed Markey (MA), Rep. Angela Romero (UT), Rep. José Pérez Cordero (PR), and Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA). Credit: NHCSL.



From top left: NHCSL's Guillermo Mena; NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT); Maria Cardona of Dewey Square Group and Rep. Christopher Rosario (CT); Live music playing during joint party with the Latino Members of the Massachusetts Black and Latino Caucus. Credit: NHCSL.

From bottom left: Dewey Square Group's Maria Cardona during a media training; Rep. Carlos Gonzalez (MA) delivering welcome remarks; members of the Puerto Rico delegation. Credit: NHCSL.

# BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES BY INVESTING IN CVI PROGRAMS



By Sen. Cristina Castro (IL), NHCSL Vice President for Public Policy

There are countless examples of innocent lives being lost to weapons of war. In 2024 alone, there were 41,029 deaths caused by gun violence, over 1,400 of which were children, as well as 503 mass shootings and 1,276 unintentional incidents, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

Furthermore, and most horrifyingly, according to the CDC, firearms are the number one cause of death for children in the United States, including homicide, suicide and accidental shootings.

These numbers are not just statistics, they represent lives lost, families shattered, and communities traumatized. The ripple effects of gun violence go far beyond the immediate victims, impacting mental health, economic stability, and public trust in safety systems. The urgency to act is not only political, it is moral as well.

Latinos are affected at a disproportionate rate than their non-Hispanic counterparts. This disparity stems from a multitude of systemic factors: concentrated poverty, underinvestment in urban infrastructure, limited access to mental health services, and higher exposure to community violence. Every year, thousands of Latinos lose their lives to gun violence, with over 36% of those deaths resulting from suicide. Hispanic people are also two times more likely to die by gun homicide and four times more likely to be wounded in an assault involving firearms. Gun violence in Latino communities is often concentrated in urban areas where cycles of poverty and underinvestment persist, leaving families vulnerable and unsupported.

To tackle this issue as comprehensively as possible, in recent years, our Caucus has taken a strong and consistent stance on reducing gun violence through common-sense legislation. In Res. 2018-10 Common Sense Gun Safety to Prevent Terrorism and School Massacres, we called for a range of reforms, including raising the minimum age to purchase firearms, banning dangerous weapon modifications, and implementing comprehensive background checks. We expanded on this commitment in Res. 2021-19 Targeting the Data Gaps in Gun Violence and Police Use of Force, urging states to invest in data infrastructure and research. In Res. 2024-16 Secure Weapons Storage, where we advocated for secure firearm storage laws and public awareness campaigns.

Most recently, we passed Emergency Res. 2025-06 Enacting and Funding Community Violence

Intervention and Firearm Dealer Accountability Programs to Prevent Gun Violence and Calling on Congress to Restore Successful Grants and Reorganize and Strengthen Gun Violence Prevention and Enforcement, because while it has proven difficult for Congress to agree on other forms of gun control, such as assault weapons bans, targeted, culturally informed policy solutions like Community violence intervention are less politically co-opted and essential to reversing these trends.

Community violence intervention (CVI) programs focus on individuals who are most at risk for gun violence, offering support through trusted community members, mental-health services, and conflict mediation. These programs operate through models such as street outreach, where trained violence interrupters mediate conflicts and prevent retaliation, and hospital-based violence intervention programs, which engage victims of violence while they are still in the hospital to offer trauma-informed care and wraparound services. CVI programs have demonstrated measurable success across the country. In Baltimore, the Safe Streets initiative led to a 16-23% reduction in homicides and non-fatal shootings, while New York's Save Our Streets program saw a 63% drop in gun victimization. According to the Urban Institute, targeted CVI efforts have been associated with a 32% reduction of shooting victimization and a 23% reduction in overall shooting patterns among participating groups. These programs are proactive, community-led

solutions that build trust, promote healing, and offer alternatives to violence. By investing in CVI programs and following data driven strategies, we can reduce trauma, save lives, and build safer communities.

With a stark shift in administrations, gun violence is currently placed at the backburner. Despite his tough stance on crime, the Trump administration has dismantled the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, cut funding for community-based violence prevention programs, and rolled back on regulations that require background checks. These thoughtless actions have left vulnerable communities without any safeguards or critical support. The dismantling of the White House Office of Gun Violence prevention is a signal of a troubling shift towards reactive based approaches rather than evidence-based solutions, ignoring the root causes of gun violence.

Our Caucus remains committed to advancing policies that protect our communities and prevent the needless loss of life. We urge Congress to adopt, fund and restore policies focused on secure firearm storage, comprehensive background checks, and data driven prevention strategies. Gun violence is not inevitable; it is preventable. By working together, we can create safer spaces for our children, families, and neighborhoods. The time to act is now, not when we are confronted with another headline.

*Building on this momentum, NHCSL Emergency Resolution 2025-06 calls for urgent federal and state action to prevent gun violence. The resolution demands:*

- *Funding for Community Violence Intervention programs, which provide trauma-informed support, conflict mediation, and mental health services.*
- *Accountability for firearm dealers, including stricter oversight and penalties for illegal sales.*
- *Restoration of successful federal grants that support local violence prevention efforts.*
- *Reorganization and strengthening of gun violence prevention infrastructure, including the reinstatement of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention.*
- *The creation of new funding streams through excise taxes on firearm and ammunition sales, with proceeds dedicated to prevention efforts.*



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Follow us on Twitter/X and Instagram at @NHCSL and find us on Facebook as NHCSL - National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators.

Visit [www.nhcsl.org](http://www.nhcsl.org) to learn more!





# A VOICE FOR THE VALLEY: REP. ERIN GAMEZ'S FIGHT TO UPLIFT SOUTH TEXAS

By Isabel Vuittonet and Andrea Maldonado, NHCSL Interns

In the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, where the border meets resilience, Rep. Erin Gamez stands as a powerful new voice for South Texans. The youngest and first woman to represent District 38, Rep. Gamez brings her Brownsville roots to the Texas Capitol with a fierce commitment to her community's future, whether that's fighting for fair representation, championing small businesses, or building opportunities through local workforce development.

Once defined by its agricultural roots, the Valley has transformed into a hub for aerospace and technology development, fueling growth that too often comes at the expense of its residents. Challenges in workforce development, environmental justice, healthcare, and education persist. Rep. Gamez's legislative agenda seeks to ensure that progress uplifts the community rather than coming at its expense. Her work and advocacy on the House floor reflect the Rio Grande Valley's complexity as a region that is simultaneously growing and overlooked.

Born and raised in Brownsville, Texas, Rep. Gamez's journey to the House floor is driven by her passion for advocacy and serving her community. From the courtroom to drafting impactful legislation in the Texas Capitol, she's made it her mission to ensure her community is seen, heard, and shaping the State's next chapter. For Rep. Gamez, representing the 94% Hispanic population of the Rio Grande Valley means confronting the distance, both literal and political, between Austin and the border region. The decisions that shape the Valley's economy, infrastructure, and education are often made far from the people they affect the most. Rep. Gamez has positioned herself as a connector between those worlds, working to close the gap between policymaking in the capital and lived experience in the Rio Grande Valley.

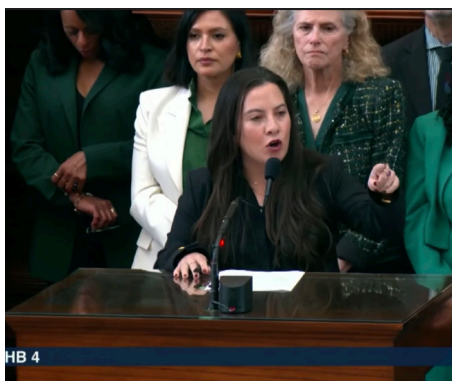
The Texas legislator has proposed numerous policies to incentivize job creation, entrepreneurship, and drive economic development in South Texas. In the 89th legislative session, Rep. Gamez introduced H.B.1154 to develop a skilled labor task force dedicated to her district, called "Brownsville Rising." The force would consist of prominent representatives from an array of sectors to develop strategies that address unique workforce challenges impacting the region, such as skill and education gaps, to incentivize economic opportunity for the next generation. As an active member of the House Committees on Transportation, Natural Resources, and General Investigating, which she presides as vice-chair, Rep. Gamez brings the lived experiences of her family, constituency, and her own to the meeting room.

Beyond her legislative efforts, Rep. Gamez stands as a powerful leader for Hispanic voices and her community. She currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus (MALC), a

role that honored her as Freshman of the Year in 2023, and enhances her advocacy for the large Hispanic population in Texas. Through MALC, Rep. Gamez and her co-members attempt to build power for the Latino Community in the House of Representatives through legislative action and advocacy. At the apex of her advocacy for the community, Rep. Gamez joined the fight against H.B.4 on congressional redistricting. On August 20th, 2025, she delivered a powerful speech in opposition of HB4, highlighting how the redrawn district for South Texas, CD34, removes over 294,000 Hispanic voices from the region and sprawls them to north of Nueces County, almost 200 miles away. She questioned how this 38% reduction in Hispanic voices from the northern border of Mexico to the center of Texas is fair and unique to the voices from South Texas.

"They [H.B.4 supporters] are so afraid of how fearfully you are about to rise up that we [the legislature] are building walls, carving lines, and destroying communities to make sure that you don't stand up...I will never stop being proud of being from the Valley and I will never stop fighting for your voice," Rep. Gamez said.

Upon the passing of H.B.4 in special session and her return to Brownsville, Texas, Rep. Gamez prioritizes grassroots efforts to instill her commitment to fight for the voice of her community. Knocking doors and meeting people in their living room, it's the public servant's mission to show her constituency that she holds her values and interests at heart. Emphasizing conversations on affordable cost of living, healthcare, and saving Hispanic representation, her efforts in the home front will serve as fuel for her return to the Texas Capitol for the 2026 legislative session.



Rep. Erin Gamez addressing the Texas Legislature during the H.B. 4 debate. Credit: Rep. Gamez.





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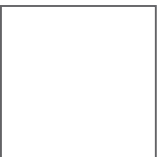
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