



## STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

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# PROTECTING OUR YOUTH FROM THE THREAT OF IMMIGRATION RAIDS IN SCHOOLS

By Kenneth Romero, NHCSL Executive Director

In recent months, we have witnessed growing challenges for Hispanic and immigrant communities across the United States. Immigration raids conducted through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have, in many cases, contributed to racialized harm affecting US citizens, lawful permanent residents, asylum seekers, and individuals from mixed status and undocumented families. These enforcement practices are creating significant barriers for our youth, particularly within public education systems.

Importantly, concern over the way immigration enforcement is being carried out is not limited to any one political party. Recent national polling shows that a clear majority of Americans —across Republicans, Democrats, and Independents— believe current enforcement tactics have gone too far. According to a February 2026 PBS News/NPR/Marist poll, 65% of Americans say ICE enforcement actions have gone too far, and about six in ten disapprove of how those actions are being conducted. While Americans may hold differing views on immigration policy overall, there is broad, bipartisan agreement that enforcement should be done in a way that is humane, lawful, and does not undermine the safety and wellbeing of communities, especially children.

In *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), the Supreme Court affirmed that all children in the United States have a right to free and accessible public education, regardless of immigration status. This right is undermined when immigration authorities like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operate in educational settings. These activities can inflict psychological—and sometimes physical— harm, while disrupting learning and contributing to adverse educational outcomes, as our Caucus determined in Res. 2017-18 on the

impact of the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program on Educational Attainment and Community Stability*.

Moreover, ICE operations —such as surveillance, questioning, detention, and arrest—within schools discourage attendance by students of mixed status and undocumented families, especially amongst younger children. These outcomes raise serious concerns about whether the constitutional right to education is, in fact, being protected. These concerns are further exacerbated by DHS’ recent memorandum to supersede and rescind its “Protected Areas” policy, thereby allowing enforcement actions in schools, playgrounds, hospitals, places of worship, and other community institutions.

While immigration operations continue to target our communities, we have seen a rise of ICE impersonators who intentionally exploit vulnerable communities, through sexual harassment, assault and other criminal acts, targeting individuals perceived to be immigrants.

Schools are also reporting heightened anxiety, trauma and chronic absenteeism, patterns consistent with our findings in Res. 2019-11. These trends underscore the broader educational and mental health impacts of immigration-related enforcement.

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need to equip school personnel — often the first line of support for affected students— with clear guidance and best practices to support immigrant and refugee youth. National organizations such as the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have already begun providing such guidance, signaling the need for broader, coordinated policy responses.

Policymakers should also consider federal action, including passage of Protecting

Sensitive Locations Act, which would codify protections for schools and other community institutions by limiting immigration enforcement in these spaces.

**STATE LEGISLATORS SHOULD ADVANCE POLICIES REQUIRING SCHOOLS TO ADOPT SAFE ZONES PROTOCOLS, SUCH AS:**

- 1) *No third-party access to schools without site authorization*
- 2) *Clear procedures for handling requests from immigration agents, including verification of ID, purpose, and warrants*
- 3) *Notification to all parties of updated institutional policies related to ICE*
- 4) *Prohibition on providing educational records without family consent or warrant, and*
- 5) *State reimbursement for any costs incurred by schools implementing these policies*

States should further require that these policies explicitly prohibit the collection or disclosure of student immigration status except where legally required and support the creation of school-based task forces to coordinate responses with legal and community partners. To ensure accessibility, all policies should be accessible in the languages spoken by the student population.

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Familia,

It's an honor to greet you in this edition of NHCSL's newsletter, the first since I became President of our Caucus, and in a moment that calls for unity, clarity of purpose, and collective resolve.



One of the greatest strengths of NHCSL

is the power we harness when we come together. The relationships we build, the knowledge we share, and the support we offer one another make us stronger legislators and more effective advocates for the communities we serve. I encourage each of you to continue engaging with the many resources our organization provides and to remain connected with our dedicated staff and, just as importantly, with one another.

As state legislators, and as members of this Caucus, we carry the voices and the aspirations for a better tomorrow of our communities into our state capitals. Together, we share the responsibility to meet this moment with both courage and collaboration.

Across the country, our communities are navigating complex challenges that test our institutions, our values, and our progress. Moments like these remind us why our presence in public service matters. We are called not only to protect the progress that has opened doors for so many, but also to expand opportunity so the next generation can dream even bigger.

Let's continue showing up for one another, working side by side, and lifting each other up as we move forward. The work ahead is important—and together—we are more than ready to meet the moment.

Thank you for your continued leadership and for the work you do every day on behalf of your communities. I look forward to all that we will accomplish together this year and throughout my tenure.

Respectfully,

**Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT)**  
NHCSL President



## REP. JUAN CANDELARIA INSTALLED AS NHCSL PRESIDENT FOR 2025-2027

NHCSL is proud to announce the installation of Representative Juan Candelaria (CT) as its new President. After assuming duties during our 23rd Annual Summit in Oklahoma City, Rep. Candelaria will lead the Caucus through 2027, heading a newly elected leadership team dedicated to advancing the interests of the nation's Hispanic communities. President-Elect Sen. Cristina Castro (IL), Vice President for Public Policy Del. Joseline Peña-Melnyk (MD), Vice President for Membership Rep. Ramón Romero (TX), Secretary Sen. Nilsa Cruz-Pérez (NJ), Treasurer Rep. José Pérez Cordero (PR), and East Region Chair Rep. Carlos González (MA), West Sen. Leo Jaramillo (NM), South Sen. Michael Brooks-Jiménez (OK), and Midwest Rep. Eva-Dina Delgado (IL), will serve alongside him and our Immediate Past President, Rep. Angela Romero (UT).

Rep. Candelaria brings over two decades of legislative experience to the presidency,

having served Connecticut's 95th District since 2002. In 2017, he made history as the first Latino to be named Deputy Speaker of the Connecticut General Assembly. His extensive legislative background includes serving on the Appropriations and Education committees, where he has been a tireless advocate for educational equity and youth empowerment. During his tenure, he has led pivotal efforts to increase Latino civic engagement through voter registration and education initiatives.

President Candelaria outlined a vision for the Caucus rooted in collaboration and mutual respect. He emphasized that he would prioritize an "unwavering focus on the realities and needs of Hispanic communities across the Nation." Under President Candelaria's leadership, the Caucus will continue its mission as a nonpartisan, strong voice for Latino communities in state legislatures nationwide.



From top left: NHCSL's Guillermo Mena, Immediate Past President Rep. Angela Romero (UT) and Matthew Morgan, Special Envoy to the Chickasaw Nation; NHCSL President Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT), NHCSL's Kenneth Romero, Rep. Angela Romero (UT) Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt and Sen. Michael Brooks-Jiménez (OK); Lionel Ramos, Spain's Ambassador Angeles Moreno Bau, Hispanic Heritage Foundation's Antonio Tijerino and Sen. Teresa Ruiz (NJ); Former BBA Chair Jamie Oldani gets recognize for her tenure; energy policy session;

Cont.: Asm. Juan Carrillo (CA), Sen. Cindy Nava (NM), Sen. Rebecca Saldaña (WA), Sen. Nilsa Cruz-Perez (NJ), Rep. Darilyn Burgos (PA), Kenneth Romero and Sen. Michael Brooks-Jimenez (OK) with members of the Latino Community Development Agency; Sen. Flavio Bravo (AZ), Guillermo Mena, Sen. Cristina Castro (IL), Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT) and Rep. Angela Romero (UT); Rep. Angélica Guerrero-Cuellar; Sen. Cristina Castro, Rep. Fred Crespo and Rep. Eva-Dina Delgado of Illinois; NHCSL members pose together during the Noche de Celebración. Credits: NHCSL.



## EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES: A RECAP OF THE 23RD ANNUAL SUMMIT

This past November, NHCSL hosted its 23rd Annual Summit in Oklahoma City, a location chosen to highlight one of the Nation's fastest-growing Latino regions. The gathering marked a pivotal moment for Hispanic state legislators to align on a forward-looking policy agenda that is already shaping this year's legislative priorities nationwide.

Throughout the Summit, legislators engaged in substantive discussions on key policy areas affecting Latino communities, including the role of financial technology in expanding financial inclusion, strategies to modernize the workforce, and solutions to improve energy affordability. Other sessions explored the need for greater transparency in medical debt and addressed the enormous health risks of compounded obesity medications that have not been vetted by the FDA for safety, efficacy, or quality.

A standout moment of the convening was a landmark discussion on tribal sovereignty at the Oklahoma State Capitol, underscoring the important intersection between Hispanic and Native American communities. The Summit concluded with a powerful conversation on Hispanic contributions to American identity, featuring Ambassador Angeles Moreno Bau of Spain, Antonio Tijerino of Hispanic Heritage Foundation, and Senator Teresa Ruiz of New Jersey, moderated by Lionel Ramos of KOSU.

During the Noche de Celebración the 2025 Legislator of the Year Award was presented to New Jersey legislators Sen. Teresa Ruiz, and Asms. Julio Marengo, Carmen Morales and Annette Quijano, for their work in mandating Latino history instruction in schools. The Texas Mexican American Legislative Caucus (MALC) received the Trailblazer Award for its efforts to combat discriminatory redistricting, and Ivan Jaime

of Walmart was recognized as Partner of the Year.

In keeping with NHCSL's commitment to giving back to communities, the Summit concluded with a service initiative in partnership with the Latino Community Development Agency. Together, volunteers distributed Thanksgiving groceries and gifts to 400 families, reaching an estimated 4,000 Oklahomans. This vital work was made possible through the generous support of our corporate partners: Walmart, Whole Foods, and Amazon.

A key outcome of the Summit was the approval of a broad slate of policy resolutions for 2025, reflecting our legislator's shared commitment to advancing solutions for the most pressing challenges facing their constituents.

## NHCSL SETS BOLD POLICY AGENDA WITH RATIFICATION OF 2025 RESOLUTIONS

At its recent Annual Meeting in Oklahoma City, NHCSL took a decisive step in shaping the future of the communities it serves by ratifying a comprehensive slate of eighteen new policy resolutions for 2025. Developed through the organization's policy task forces, these initiatives provide a strategic roadmap for Hispanic state legislators as they prepared for this year's legislative sessions.

The scope of these resolutions reflects both the urgency and diversity of the challenges facing Latino communities in the US. The Healthcare Task Force led the charge with seven resolutions, including critical measures such as Res. 2025-03 *Addressing Cancer Disparities in the Hispanic/Latino*

*Community* and Res. 2025-18, *Ensuring Existing Protections for No-cost Preventive Services*.

Housing affordability and economic security also emerged as top priorities. Lawmakers approved Res. 2025-01, *Promoting Rental Fee Transparency and Fairness*, alongside Res. 2025-14, *Advancing Universal No-Cost Childcare* to support working families and strengthen economic mobility.

NHCSL also reaffirmed its commitment to protecting vulnerable communities. Res. 2025-05 calls for *A Safe and Welcoming Learning Environment Free from the Threat of Immigration Raids and Violent Detention*, while Res. 2025-16 *Out of the Shadows*,

*Into Dignity*, supports enactment of the Dignity Act as a pathway to comprehensive immigration reform. Moreover, Res. 2025-12 underscores that Hispanic Peoples and the Spanish Language are Integral to American History and should be meaningfully reflected in classrooms and public life.

NHCSL Executive Director Kenneth Romero described the resolutions as a "clear blueprint" for advancing measurable, community-centered change through rigorous analysis and bipartisan collaboration. Collectively, the 2025 policy slate reinforces NHCSL's role as a leading voice in accountable, forward-looking policymaking.



Our Team

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