



STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

IN THIS ISSUE:

- FOSTERING THE HISPANIC VOTE
- LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
- MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES FOR LATINOS
- NEW LEADERSHIP AFTER 21ST ANNUAL SUMMIT

MOBILIZING THE HISPANIC VOTE IN THE 2024 ELECTION

By Kenneth Romero, NHCSL Executive Director

The potential impact of eligible Hispanic voters on determining government representation keeps growing. Approximately 36.2 million Latinos are eligible to vote this year, up from 32.3 million in the last Presidential Election. According to the Pew Research Center, 14.7% of all eligible voters nationwide will be Hispanic by November of this year.

This increment will be mostly felt in states with crucial toss-up races like California, Texas, Florida, New Mexico, Nevada, and Arizona, where Latino eligible voters already make up over 20% of the electorate.

However, according to the same study, Latinos “are less likely than Americans overall to be eligible to vote (53% v. 72%).” This is partly because the Hispanic population includes people who are too young to vote or who are not U.S. citizens: 29% of Latinos are under 18, compared to 22% of the U.S. overall.

While many Latino organizations and elected officials are highly involved in voter mobilization and have advocated for higher engagement from political parties, more often than not the investment and outreach from the parties fall short and leave voters with the feeling that they are an afterthought, or that their votes are taken for granted.

This lack of sustained investment is highly damaging to our democracy. Even though voter mobilization falls heavily on c4 organizations and political parties and campaigns, elected officials, and organizations like NHCSL can do more to increase Hispanic civic and voting participation, especially from those who are disconnected from politics.

The 2023 National Survey of Latino Voters, conducted by UnidosUS, identified the economy as the top issue for Hispanics. Economic disparities, such as lack of access to affordable housing, higher

unemployment rates, and the Latina wage gap, to name a few, could remain unaddressed if Latino voter turnout is low. New research from the Urban Institute shows that the average wealth gap between white and Hispanic families exceeded \$1 million in household wealth in 2022. Without the political pressure generated by active Latino participation, policymakers may not prioritize initiatives aimed at reducing these economic inequalities.

Access to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, was also one of the top three concerns for Hispanics, regardless of their personal beliefs around birth control and abortion. As we have seen since the Dobbs decision, state legislatures have a pivotal role in protecting – or restricting – access to comprehensive reproductive care. In states like Florida and Arizona, where abortion bans have gone into effect in the past few weeks, the Latino vote this November could decide whether or not reproductive rights get restored.

You, the members of our Caucus, can be the catalyst that unleashes our collective power.

You are living testament of what Hispanic communities can achieve when Latino voters stand behind elected officials that put our interests front and center. For example, Colorado has seen a 21% increase in voter participation (56% to 68%), thanks in part to a substantial increase in Latino voter engagement. At the same time, the number of Hispanic state legislators has doubled, which made policies such as the “for cause” eviction law — spearheaded this year by Rep. Javier Mabrey, Sen. Julie Gonzales, and the Colorado Latino Caucus— a reality and an effective way to guarantee that families will keep a roof above their heads.

If the sleeping giant of the Latino vote awakens, we’re going to keep seeing better policies materialize nationwide for our communities in a sustainable and consistent way and see our representation increase and achieve its full potential. We are excited to keep working towards this goal and further represent Latino interests at all levels of government.



Polling place in Miami, FL

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear *Familia*,

I'm excited to greet you all in this edition of NHCSL's newsletter, the first since I had the honor of being sworn in last

December as your President to lead our Caucus for the next two years. My main commitment for my tenure is to help all of you become more effective legislators. To that end, please make sure to maximize the resources our organization has to offer. Our staff is eager to assist you.

These resources and the connections we make with each other are important when facing challenges like this year's legislative session.

Our communities are facing attacks through multiple flanks, bearing once again the brunt of a new version of the culture wars we've seen through different words and concepts for the last few years now. It's up to us to stand up for the institutions, laws, and precedents that gave us the rights we now enjoy, and have allowed us to advance our careers, and now serve our constituents. But, as I said during our Spring Meeting's Executive Committee, we cannot do that alone.

This year, possibly more than any other since we started serving in our state's capitols, we need to defend our identities and our rights to spaces and opportunities that will help the next generations achieve their dreams. We must continue standing up for what's right and defend the diversity that makes our nation strong and distinguishes us from others in the world.

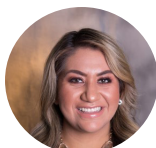
Let's keep working together and supporting each other. Our districts, states, and our country deserve it.

Respectfully,

Rep. Angela Romero (UT)
NHCSL President



THE STATE OF LATINO MENTAL HEALTH



By Rep. Alma Hernández (AZ), Chair of NHCSL's Healthcare Task Force

Latinos face a multitude of challenges that can significantly impact their mental health. From navigating cultural identity and language barriers to confronting systemic inequalities and discrimination, the pressures on our communities can weigh heavily. Moreover, factors such as socioeconomic status, immigration status, and access to healthcare further create barriers to mental wellness.

The National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS) conducted a survey and found that only 28.1% of Hispanics sought treatment, compared to 44.8% of non-Hispanics, despite having similar rates of mental disorders to non-Hispanics.

Additionally, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), found that the poverty rate of Hispanics is nearly two times higher (17%) than non-Hispanic white Americans (9.5%) causing nearly 18% of Hispanics the decline of health insurance in 2021, compared to about 6% of non-Hispanic white Americans.

This treatment gap is often attributed to factors such as the stigma surrounding mental health within Latino communities, a shortage of culturally competent mental health providers, and systemic barriers to accessing care. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) analyzed healthcare disparities in the United States which highlighted significant disparities in mental health treatment among Latino populations. The report indicated that Latinos were less likely to receive mental health care, even when controlling for factors such as insurance status and income.

Addressing these disparities requires an approach that acknowledges the unique cultural and contextual factors influencing mental health. First and foremost, destigmatizing conversations around mental health within Latino communities is essential.

Furthermore, increasing the availability of culturally competent mental health services will involve not only recruiting and training more mental health professionals from diverse backgrounds but also ensuring that existing services are accessible and responsive to the needs of Hispanics.

Prioritizing the social determinants of mental health remains essential. NHCSL Res. 2021-14 *Raising Awareness about the Value of Self-Care*; Res. 2020-06 *Equity Plan for Affordable Healthcare*; Res. 2020-03 *Declaring Institutional Racism a Public Health Crisis*; and 2012-10 *Resolution on Mental Health and Addiction Service*; among others, provide starting points for states to build the networks needed to better treat Hispanic mental health.



Rep. Geraldo Reyes (CT)
Credit: Connecticut House Democrats

This also involves legislating for specific policies that directly impact the well-being of Latino youth and their families, such as H.B. 5001, co-sponsored by Rep. Geraldo Reyes (CT) and other NHCSL members in the Connecticut Legislature, which was signed into law by Gov. Lamont in 2022. This legislation addresses the urgent needs of the state's children's mental and behavioral health system. In response to the exacerbated youth mental health crisis, particularly highlighted by the pandemic's impact, the bill targets increased rates of depression, suicide, and self-harm among adolescents.

By investing in prevention, early intervention, and community-based support services, we can ensure that all Hispanics have the opportunity to thrive emotionally, mentally, and socially.

NEW NHCSL LEADERSHIP ELECTED AT 21ST ANNUAL SUMMIT IN PHILADELPHIA

Last November, NHCSL held its 21st Annual Summit in Philadelphia and elected new leadership to serve alongside Rep. Angela Romero for the 2024-2025 period.

Rep. Angela Romero (UT) will serve as the Caucus' President, alongside a newly elected leadership that includes Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT) as President-Elect, Rep. Victoria Neave (TX) as Vice President for Membership, Sen. Cristina Castro (IL) as Vice President for Public Policy, Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA) as Secretary, and Rep. Ángel Matos (PR), as Treasurer. Additionally, Asm. Jessica González-Rojas (NY) will serve as East Region Chair, Sen. Jason Esteves

(GA) as South Region Chair, Sen. Celina Villanueva (IL) as Midwest Region Chair. Then Rep. Marcelino Quiñonez (AZ) had been elected as West Region Chair, but recently resigned from his position in the Arizona legislature.

In her first remarks as NHCSL President, Rep. Romero stated: "I am profoundly honored to start my tenure. Since I was elected to Utah's House of Representatives in 2012, I have been involved with our organization, and I accept this position with gratitude and humbleness leading it into the future. I look forward to a tenure based on collaboration and mutual respect, while always centering our communities' needs."

The Annual Summit's policy sessions began with keynote remarks from FCC Commissioner Anna Gómez, and were followed by discussions around Artificial Intelligence, Debt Collection and Evictions, and a fireside chat with Comcast's VP of DEI Juan Otero, among others.

Additionally, the Caucus adopted resolutions including Res. 2013-06 *Automatic Enrollment and Streamlined Renewal in Medicaid*; Res. 2023-10 *Condemning and Prohibiting the Discriminatory Book Bans*; Res. 2023-11 *Repeal Legislation that Criminalizes Helping Undocumented People*, condemning Florida's SB 1718; among others.



From top left: Former Rep. Marcelino Quiñonez (AZ), Sen. Jason Esteves (GA), Sen. Celina Villanueva (IL), NHCSL Immediate Past President Sen. Nellie Pou (NJ), NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT), Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA), Sen. Cristina Castro (IL), Asm. Jessica González-Rojas (NY), Rep. Ángel Matos (PR) and Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT); Comcast's Juan Otero and Telemundo's Valeria Aponite; Rep. Arturo Alonso-Sandoval (OK), NHCSL's Kenneth Romero, Rep. Annie Menz (OK) and Sen. Michael Brooks-Jiménez (OK); Rep. Javier Mabrey (CO), Judge Matt Wolf and Pew Charitable Trust's Katie Martin and Octavia Howell. Credits: NHCSL.



From bottom left: Sen. Cristina Castro (IL), Rep. Carlos González (MA), NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT), Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA), NHCSL Immediate Past President Sen. Nellie Pou (NJ), Del. Joseline Peña-Melnyk (MD), former Del. Elizabeth Guzmán (VA), Sen. Daniel Ivey-Soto (NM) and Rep. Ángel Matos (PR); New Jersey's Asw. Alixon Collazos-Gill, Sen. Teresa Ruiz, Sen. Nilsa Cruz-Pérez, NHCSL Immediate Past President Sen. Nellie Pou and Asw. Yvonne López. Credits: NHCSL.



From top left: NYS Asm. Jessica González-Rojas and Sen. Gustavo Rivera; NHCSL's Kenneth Romero, NHCSL Immediate Past President Sen. Nellie Pou (NJ), NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT), and NHCSL's Guillermo Mena; NHCSL's Kenneth Romero and NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT), State Innovation Exchange(SIX) 's Laura Hernández and Yenisbel Vilorio. Credits: NHCSL.

From bottom left: Walmart's Sri Alturi and Zinc Labs' Ben Resnik; NHCSL's 2023 Annual Summit; NHCSL's Kenneth Romero, BBA of the Year recipient Everytown for Gun Safety's José Dávila, NHCSL's BBA Chair Jamie Oldani and NHCSL Immediate Past President Sen. Nellie Pou; FCC Commissioner Anna Gómez during her keynote remarks. Center: NHCSL's 2023 Annual Summit. Credits: NHCSL.



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2024 Summer Executive Committee and BBA Meeting

Scottsdale, Arizona - July 11th-13th



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