



Testimony of

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Committee on Youth Services

Oversight: Addressing the Needs of New York City's Latino Disconnected Youth

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Good morning. My name is Moira Flavin and I am the Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 68-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chair Fidler, as well as the members of the Youth Services Committee, for holding today's hearing to explore the needs of New York City's disconnected Latino youth.

Recent data from CCC's 2010 edition of *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, our bi-annual book detailing over 400 child well-being indicators, paint a vivid picture of the health and welfare of New York City's children.¹ Examination of the information specifically about Latino youth demonstrates the varied challenges that they face with regard to education, employment, contact with the juvenile justice system, and teen pregnancy rates. Indeed, these statistics emphasize the need for increased educational supports and youth programming for New York City's Latino youth.

The data in *Keeping Track* show that a significant percentage of Latino youth face educational and economic challenges as they approach adulthood. During the 2007-2008 school year, almost 18 percent of Latino youth dropped out of high school. Although this number represents a decrease from preceding years,² it remains sobering, especially when compared with the lower citywide high school drop-out rate (13.5 percent), and with the drop-out rates of New York City's other large racial and ethnic groups during this same time period (e.g., 13.1 percent of Black and 9.8 percent of White New York City youth dropped out of high school). Related, and also concerning, is the almost 38 and 40 percent of Latino students in New York City public schools who, respectively, failed to meet the New York graduation requirements for English and math in 2008.³

Similarly, examination of education and employment data about youth ages 16 to 19 show lower rates of Latino participation in school and the workforce. In 2008, 10.7 percent of Latino youth were not in school, and had not yet graduated. This number is larger than both the citywide 7 percent average, as well as the averages for each of the other large New York City racial and ethnic groups, such as Blacks (7 percent), Whites (3 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (3.6 percent). Latinos were also the group with the largest rate of youth ages 16 to 19 who were neither in school, nor in the labor force (9.7 percent).⁴

Further, although Latino youths do not comprise the largest racial or ethnic group represented in New York's juvenile justice system, a large number of Latinos have had contact with city detention centers and state juvenile justice facilities. In 2009, 25.4

¹ The data from *Keeping Track* is also available at www.cccnewyork.org.

² For example, in 2006, 23.1 percent of Latino youth dropped out of high school.

³ This New York City public school statistic does not include information about New York City charter schools.

⁴ The contrast between Latinos and other major New York City ethnic/racial groups was not as large for this particular statistic. Citywide, 8 percent of youth ages 16 to 19 were neither participating in school nor in the workplace; 9.5 percent of Black youth, 5.6 percent of White youth, and 4.3 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander youth fit this description.

percent of youth entering Department of Juvenile Justice (“DJJ”) detention centers were Latino.⁵ In addition, 31.4 percent of youth entering New York State Office of Children and Family Services’ (“OCFS”) juvenile placement facilities were Latino.⁶

Finally, statistics show that teenage Latina girls and boys face unique and particularly daunting sets of challenges compared to New York City teenagers of the same sex but different ethnicities. For example, Latina youth comprised 57.3 percent of the teenage mothers in New York City, even though they represented just over 33 percent of the City’s female population between the ages of 15 and 19. This was the highest teen birth rate for any large race or ethnic groups: in 2007, 52.8 of every 1,000 Latina girls, ages 15 to 19, had a child, compared with 34.6, 8.6, and 7.5 out of every 1,000 Black, White, and Asian/Pacific Islander teens in that age group, respectively. Further, and incredibly troubling, is the high rate of Latina teens that have attempted suicide. According to a 2009 Center for Disease Control survey of almost 9,500 high school students, 15 percent of New York City Latina teens had attempted suicide that year, compared with 6.2 percent of White and 10.2 percent of African-American teen girls.⁷

Similarly, the data from recent reports show that higher rates of Latino male youth in New York City struggle with educational obstacles compared to New York City teenage boys who are of other races and/or ethnicities. For example, the New York City Independent Budget Office’s 2011 Annual Report entitled *New York City Public School Indicators: Demographics, Resources, and Outcomes*, released earlier this month, reported that Hispanic male high school students fared poorly on State Regents exams, with 47.8 percent failing the Math Regents and 35 percent failing the English Regents – this latter number representing a higher rate of English Regents failures than in any other race or ethnic group.⁸ Further, the August 2011 *Young Men’s Initiative Report to the Mayor from the Chairs* stated that 43 percent of Latino males ages 16 to 24 have less than a high school degree, as compared with 32 percent of Black males and 13 percent of White males in that same age group.

Overall, recent data demonstrate that a notable percent of New York City’s Latino youth face significant difficulties as they approach adulthood. Without the supports or educational credentials needed to secure employment and support themselves, Latino youth risk serious disconnection.

The data serve to remind us that, despite the economic difficulties that our City has faced in recent years, we must protect investments in youth services, education, and child care. We thank the City Council for their hard work during City Budget negotiations earlier this year. Your efforts demonstrate your commitment to fund youth development, youth

⁵ Children enter New York City juvenile detention centers when they have been remanded, but have not yet been adjudicated to be juvenile delinquents. Due to a 2010 merger between the DJJ and the Administration for Children’s Services (“ACS”), ACS now administers these facilities; the statistic cited was captured prior to the merger.

⁶ Children may be placed in OCFS facilities after they have been adjudicated delinquent.

⁷ Youth suicide attempt data available at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/index.htm>.

⁸ This is compared to English Regents failure rates of White males (14 percent), Black males (33.9 percent), and Asian males (17 percent).

employment, and classroom instruction, as well as after-school academic and recreational programs and early childhood education. We, like you, believe that such investments are wise, as they produce good social and academic outcomes. We know, too, that preventive services alone are insufficient to address the needs of our City's youth who are already disconnected. We must therefore help to link young people to supportive programs and provide them with educational and employment opportunities, so that they can ultimately join the workforce and support themselves and their families. For example, youth returning to their communities from detention facilities and OCFS placement, and young adult probationers, must have a strong system of educational, employment, and counseling supports in place, such as those outlined in Mayor Bloomberg's Young Men's Initiative. Also necessary are community-based programs, such as the Department of Youth and Community Development's programs, which provide basic literacy and job skills to the most vulnerable New York City young people, including homeless and foster youth. As the City approaches the fall budget modifications and the 2013 budget, we will be tracking budgetary actions in these program areas.

Finally, we wish to bring to the Council's attention a State education issue that has the potential to negatively impact New York City's disconnected youth, and therefore must be closely monitored. Earlier this year, the State planned to eliminate the January Regents examination. The January Regents exam represents an invaluable opportunity to graduate for many youth in Transfer Schools, which re-engage failing students or students who have dropped out, and for struggling students who did not pass the Regents exam on their first tries. Further, many students who must support themselves and their families need the earliest possible opportunity to take the Regents, so that they can accelerate their entrance into higher education or the workforce. Fortunately, private donations of \$1.5 million have saved the January Regents for 2012. The importance of the January exam for so many New York City youth cannot, however, be overstated, and therefore more work must be done to protect the January exam in the coming years, including securing State-funded financial supports.

In sum, we thank the City Council for holding this important hearing and look forward to working with you to protect investments in the educational and social supports upon which this vulnerable population depends.