

January 15, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
Presidential Transition Office
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-elect Biden:

Congratulations on your historic election. In the 2020 elections, Latinos—the nation’s second-largest voting bloc—turned out in record numbers to vote for political leaders who understand and would address their top concerns—namely the pandemic, the economy, and racial justice and healing. I thank you for lifting up a **priority agenda** for Latinos and pledging to address some of our community’s top concerns. I write to ask that, for your first budget which you will deliver to Congress in early February, you make Latinos and their families a full and integral part of your federal investment priorities.

We recently released a report, ***The First 100 Days: Latino Inclusion in the Biden Administration’s First Steps***, delineating our 100-day Latino policy priorities for your administration. Among them is a call for you to propose a 2022 budget that fully includes Latinos and advances the cause for racial justice. The COVID-19 health and economic crises and our country’s reckoning with systemic racism compel your administration to work to close the gaps in racial and ethnic disparities that have worsened under the pandemic, and to combat the historic and entrenched racism that continues to prevent Latinos and other communities of color from reaching their full potential. That is why I strongly urge you to propose a budget that incorporates Latino priorities. Specifically:

- Fully Include Latinos and Their Families in the Emergency Health and Economic Response to the Pandemic
- Put Our Nation on the Path to an Equitable Recovery
- Build a more Equitable Education System
- Advance Equity, Inclusion, and the Protection of Civil Rights
- Create an Immigration System that Is Efficient, Fair, and Humane

Only when these critical needs are addressed can our country truly begin to *“build back better.”*

Fully Include Latinos and Their Families in the Emergency Health and Economic Response to the Pandemic.

Latinos continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic. Today, Latinos make up nearly one out of four COVID-19 cases for which race/ethnicity data are available, even though they make up

about 18% of the total U.S. population. This is due in part to the fact that Latinos and immigrant workers are overrepresented in essential jobs, lack worker protections, have decreasing rates of health coverage, and cannot afford to stop working or completely self-quarantine if exposed. Latinos have also suffered economically, experiencing an unemployment rate that is more than double pre-pandemic levels—a figure that is even worse for Latinas. I applaud your commitment to prioritizing the defeat of COVID-19 and ask you to advance a budget that funds the urgent resources needed to achieve this goal and that fully includes the Hispanic community.

In December, after months of inaction, the U.S. Congress passed a \$900 billion COVID-19 emergency package. That bill included vital aid for the unemployed and other safety net assistance for families. Still, the plan fell far short of what is needed. Your budget plan must therefore include the funding necessary to carry out the commitments made during **your campaign** and **the transition** to address the public health and economic crises. However, additional funding for key initiatives will be required to make sure that relief also reaches Latinos. The budget plan should aim to:

- **Ensure affordable health care access.** Our country will not be able to get back on its feet until all Americans have access to the health care they need to overcome the virus. I therefore urge you to include in your budget proposal:
 - The necessary funds to ensure access to COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines to all, regardless of a person's income, insurance coverage, or immigration status.
 - \$100 million to fund Affordable Care Act (ACA) outreach and educational activities, including in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate to the needs of the populations being served by the (ACA) Exchange.
 - A significant increase in funding for culturally competent community-based organizations, which serve as trusted messengers for the Latino community and are essential to disseminating information on COVID-19. This should be leveraged with:
 - \$560 million for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide grants to state and local health departments that support the development and distribution of culturally and linguistically appropriate messages about the importance of recommended immunizations during the COVID-19 public health emergency and to combat misinformation about the safety of vaccines.
 - \$2.5 million for the CDC to develop guidance for health providers and state education agencies so that they are better able to provide culturally

appropriate and evidence-based health counseling services on the COVID-19 vaccine.

- **Ensure that all taxpaying families benefit from financial relief.** In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress deliberately excluded mixed-status families from Economic Impact Payments, denying them vital relief during a time of great need. This affected an estimated 3.7 million children and 1.7 million spouses who are either American citizens or green card holders. Thankfully, Congress partly addressed this problem by passing a COVID-19 relief package that provides \$600 to spouses and children with Social Security Numbers and retroactive cash benefits under the CARES Act which can be accessed when families file their taxes. I urge that, as part of your COVID-19 relief and recovery plan, you ensure that cash payments are provided to every person who works and pays taxes, regardless of immigration status.
- **Extend emergency nutrition support.** The Latino community has been hit particularly hard by food insecurity, with close to 50% of Hispanic households with children reporting trouble accessing food in June 2020. Unfortunately, this trend continues to rise. As such, I urge you to include in your budget proposal:
 - A boost in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to the maximum monthly benefit of 15% through the duration of the pandemic and recovery. While Congress provided this boost in the most recent relief package, it only lasts for six months.
 - An increase in the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30 to ensure that Latino families can put food on the table for the duration of the pandemic and recovery.
 - Assistance under the pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program through December 2021 to ensure the availability of resources should schools need to modify their routine schedules beyond September 2021.
 - Robust funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which would help provide food, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women and their infants.
- **Support the education of vulnerable students.** One in four students in K–12 education is Hispanic, a population that is also more likely to experience serious disruptions in their education due to the virus. This threatens the progress our country has made in closing the achievement gap. I therefore urge you to include in your budget proposal:
 - \$1 billion in supplemental funding for Title III to support the unique needs of English learners.

- \$6.8 billion for the Federal Communications Commission’s E-rate program to address the one in three Latino families who do not have high-speed internet at home.
- An increase in funding commensurate with the need in schools to partner with community-based organizations to support augmented learning for after-school programs and on school holidays to catch up on extended learning loss experienced since spring.

Put Our Nation on the Path to an Equitable Recovery.

Our country faces the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and Latinos experience the resulting hardships disproportionately. More than half of Latinos have reported struggling financially, being unable to pay for basic necessities, or having to exhaust their savings to make ends meet. An estimated 10 million Latino children live in a household that is behind on rent. A fair and just budget must make significant investments to reach beyond a return to the economic status quo before the pandemic, ensuring that everyone is able to contribute to and benefit from a lasting recovery.

- **Keep Latinos in their homes.** The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the value of an affordable home, especially for Latinos and other communities of color who are at greater risk of losing their homes through eviction or foreclosure. A stable home is critical to the health and economic well-being of all families; that is why I urge you to help ensure that Latino and other struggling households have a roof over their heads. Specifically, I urge you to propose:
 - \$100 million for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Housing Counseling Program, which empowers renters and homeowners with the financial, budgetary, and money-management advice needed to stay in their homes.
 - \$3.5 billion for the HUD national Housing Trust Fund, which helps extremely low- and very low-income households preserve affordable housing.
 - \$19 million for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Assets for Independence program, which helps stabilize low-income individuals by providing financial education, tools, and resources to rebuild their savings, offset high rental costs, and help them build wealth.
- **Empower Latino workers.** Every year, employer violations of wage and overtime obligations, poor record-keeping, and other abuses result in the financial setback of millions of U.S. workers. Because Latinos are overrepresented in low-wage jobs, more likely to be victims of wage discrepancies, and more apt than other ethnic groups to

work in dangerous environments, I urge you to reduce such abuses by investing \$298 million in the U.S. Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division, which helps enforce basic minimum wage and overtime pay standards.

- **Provide meaningful tax relief.** Even before the pandemic, Latino households struggled to make ends meet. I applaud your commitment to addressing the needs of working families, particularly by making corporations pay their fair share in taxes and advancing a more equitable tax structure. To that end, I urge you to include in your budget a highly effective means to raise families out of poverty, namely, the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) as proposed in the “Working Families Tax Relief Act.” The expansion would provide a much-needed income boost to low-income childless workers and a fully refundable CTC for parents and guardians who are currently shut out of any meaningful relief. These credits must also be extended to taxpaying mixed-status households, who are experiencing even greater economic challenges. Currently, taxpaying individuals who use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) cannot claim the EITC, and children without Social Security Numbers cannot be claimed for the CTC.

Build a more Equitable Education System.

Our education system is entangled in the ongoing legacy of systemic racism that disproportionately harms Latino students. Latinos will continue to form a greater share of the student body in K–12 and higher education; failure to address their needs will imperil our country’s competitive edge and economic prosperity. Beyond traditional school settings, adults too often lack the investments needed for them to become integrated into today’s economy. It is imperative to address the ongoing obstacles that perpetuate inequality in all forms of education and ensure that traditional and nontraditional students are afforded the opportunities to reach their full potential. The budget proposal should aim to:

- **Ensure that resources reach disadvantaged students.** Despite some educational gains, past austerity measures compounded by fallout from the pandemic have created major barriers for Latino students. That is why it is crucial to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are provided the resources they need to excel. This should include:
 - Triple funding for Head Start, the school readiness program that provides critical early childhood education, health, and nutrition programs to families living in poverty. Head Start is woefully underfunded at \$10.7 billion. Studies have shown that an increase of at least \$14.4 billion is needed to reach 100% enrollment of all currently eligible children, a cohort that continues to grow during the economic crisis. In addition, Head Start programs experienced an estimated 20% increase in operational costs resulting from the pandemic, which has not been fully addressed by emergency COVID relief.

- \$2 billion for Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to ensure that funding reflects the growing number of English learners.
- \$16.86 billion for Title I of ESSA to ensure that low-income children can meet challenging state academic standards, especially considering that 70% of Latino students are enrolled in Title I schools.
- Robust funding for high-retention pathways that increase access to the teaching profession for populations underrepresented in the education workforce, such as Grow Your Own programs.
- **Empower students in higher education.** Today, students and their families face the highest cost of college in history, caused in part by decreased investments in higher education, rising costs of living, stagnant wages, and a shift to a debt-based college financing system. There are an estimated 3.4 million Latinos enrolled in colleges and universities, a number that was expected to grow before the pandemic by 1 million by 2026. The face of our next generation of leaders is changing, and the federal government must ensure that they are ready for the economy of today and the future. That is why I urge you to include in your budget proposal:
 - Double the maximum federal Pell Grant via mandated appropriations spending to cover at least half of students' total cost of college attendance and restore the practice of inflation indexing.
 - \$1.2 billion for federal TRIO programs, which provide tutoring, rigorous coursework, and guidance to first-generation low-income college students.
 - \$400 million for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate programs (GEAR UP), which helps disadvantaged students prepare for, enroll in, and complete college.
 - \$50 million for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), which help migrant and farmworker students obtain a GED and complete their first academic year in a postsecondary institution.
 - \$350 million for the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) Program (Title V of the Higher Education Act) to expand and enhance academic offerings, program quality, and stability of these institutions.
 - \$100 million for Teacher Quality Partnership Grants and other grants that incentivize partnerships between K–12 and higher education to articulate a pathway for prospective teachers of color.

- **Invest in integrative adult education.** To ensure that families have the tools they need to prosper, it is important that federal resources reach individuals beyond traditional school settings. This includes strong funding for programs and reforms that help promote language, integration, technology, and digital literacy skills. That is why I urge you to develop equity indicators for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title II funds to ensure that adult education programs are not penalized for serving individuals who do not work outside the home or individuals with low levels of formal education and/or English. I also urge you to require state plans for WIOA Title II funds to demonstrate that adult education services provide equitable service access to parents of young and school-age children, as well as those with low levels of formal education and/or English.

Advance Equity, Inclusion, and the Protection of Civil Rights.

The structural racism that is embedded in our history has resulted in lagging economic, education, housing, and health indicators—all areas that have deteriorated even more with the pandemic. That is why I urge you to advance a budget that meaningfully closes racial and ethnic disparities, promotes equity, and roots out the discrimination that continues to plague our federal agencies and processes and perpetuates racially motivated violence against Latinos and other communities of color.

- **Fully fund the defense of civil rights across the federal agencies.** This includes growing civil rights office capacity, staff, and resources to swiftly resolve allegations of discrimination so that the protection of core civil rights becomes the norm and not the exception.
- **At minimum, allocate \$43 million for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights** to investigate and enforce penalties for civil rights violations. Funds should be allocated to subdivisions with the greatest number of complaints where substantial investigations are taking place and the focus of those investigations includes language access services.
- **Invest \$70.3 million for HUD’s Fair Housing Initiatives Program**, which helps people identify government agencies that handle complaints of housing discrimination.
- **Require the regular collection of disaggregated racial/ethnic data across state and local agencies from recipients of law enforcement grants**, such as Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG).
- **Establish and fund the creation of an Advisory Commission** dedicated to examining the outsized body of justice-involved Latinos, understanding the role that institutionalized

racism plays in interactions between Latinos and justice systems and programs, and identifying policies and practices that have historically kept Latinos justice-involved.

- **Restrict the militarization of police and strengthen law enforcement oversight.** Between 2006 and 2014, law enforcement agencies received military equipment, including weapons designed for war, worth more than \$1.5 billion. Studies have shown that when police departments receive military equipment, they are more likely to use force. While Congress recently placed some restrictions on the Department of Defense's 1033 program—which militarizes law enforcement, especially in communities of color—it does not go far enough. We must reduce funding that fuels over-policing and invest those dollars in initiatives that reduce the cycle of poverty. Further, proper oversight and reporting on any equipment passed through these programs to state and local law enforcement must be adequately funded.

Create an Immigration System that Is Efficient, Fair, and Humane.

The Trump administration's relentless campaign against immigrant communities caused major harm to Latino communities nationwide—in some cases, irreparably. During your campaign, you made several commitments related to immigration, which would require significant funding adjustments to your 2022 budget. Your budget proposal must direct a fundamental shift in how our nation uses immigration and enforcement resources, including by building an immigration system that reflects our values, supports legal immigration and the successful pursuit of U.S. citizenship, and eliminates wasteful, ineffective spending on inhumane and indiscriminate detention and enforcement.

- **Promote inclusive pandemic recovery by curbing excessive immigration enforcement spending.** As we have consistently stated, Latinos have borne a disproportionate impact of the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, the pandemic's effects demonstrate the urgent need to recommit to a robust civil rights agenda that includes everyone—regardless of immigration status—in the inclusive recovery the nation urgently needs. We urge you to ensure that your budget proposal is brought into alignment with this reality, and the enormity, of the task ahead for the nation. We firmly believe this means reevaluating the need for and extent of the excessive spending that has been devoted over the last 10 years to the often counterproductive and harmful immigration enforcement apparatus.
- **Hold immigration enforcement agencies to account.** Rather than protect us, record-high funding levels for immigration enforcement in the past four years have fomented fear and trauma in Latino and immigrant communities. Since FY2017, the current administration has routinely exceeded appropriated funding levels for immigration detention and enforcement while seeking to usurp funds from other parts of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to carry out a wasteful and indiscriminate enforcement agenda. At the same time, the agency has disregarded Congress's

demands for meaningful oversight and accountability over its activities. In the process, an estimated 6 million children, most of them Latino, live in fear that their families will be torn apart while billions of taxpayer dollars have been wasted. To make our immigration system smarter and more humane, I urge you to return funding for enforcement and removal operations to levels that marshal our limited resources to effectively prioritize serious public safety and national security threats.

- **Improve our nation’s administration of immigration services and benefits.** Apart from making our immigration enforcement priorities more effective and humane, we must restore our government’s ability to efficiently and equitably administer immigration services without drawing from the Immigration Examination Fees Account. That is why I urge:
 - \$8 million for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Office of Citizenship, which builds and cultivates partnerships with important community institutions to promote citizenship.
 - \$20 million for the USCIS Citizenship and Integration Grant Program, which assists lawful permanent residents through the naturalization process.
 - Robust funding for USCIS operations to reduce record delays and backlogs in immigration application processing and allow low-income immigrants to pursue U.S. citizenship, regardless of ability to pay.
- **Support concurrent efforts to enact much-needed immigration reform.** We applaud your commitment to immediately acting on urgent immigration reform. This is a priority for millions of Latinos throughout the nation. Concurrent with those efforts, we urge you to ensure that your budget proposal reflects your commitment to working to enact an overhaul of our nation’s immigration system by, among other things, tasking your Council of Economic Advisors with a macroeconomic analysis of how such an immigration bill would unlock the economic and human potential of immigration reform, as well as the national costs of inaction. In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that “immigration has an overall positive impact on long-run economic growth in the United States.” The Congressional Budget Office concluded the same, as reflected in their analysis of the 2013 Senate-passed immigration reform bill which would have reduced the deficit by about \$170 billion over 10 years and by almost \$1 trillion over two decades. The bill also would have reduced Social Security’s 75-year shortfall by 8%. Your budget plan should therefore include the assumption that enactment of immigration reform would generate consequential long-term cost savings and revenue generation—critical at a time with the national deficit has ballooned by over \$7 trillion over the past four years.
- **Promote the successful inclusion of immigrants into our society.** There is a demand for immigrant integration-focused programs for adult immigrants whose needs are unmet

in the adult education system. Therefore, we urge you to include in your budget funding for programs that provide adult immigrants with digital literacy and independent learning skills, integration knowledge and navigation support, and development of family integration success plans, which in turn serve as an onramp to other local resources and programming. Eligible applicants would include partnerships able to create local integration-zone models that could comprise state-local government entities, culturally competent community organizations, school districts, early learning councils, and businesses/trade associations.

- **Improve access to reputable immigration legal services.** It is well known that there are not enough immigration legal service providers to meet the demand, leaving a void that allows immigration scams to flourish and nefarious actors to thrive. In order for immigrants to come forward and complete immigration applications needed to adjust their status, more legal services capacity is needed. We urge you to encourage the expansion of programs and grants, such as but not limited to those in the Corporation for National and Community Service, to include in their programs and grants immigration legal services provisions.

Our country faces daunting challenges that will require sustained public investment to overcome them. After four years of being attacked and excluded by the Trump administration, Latinos are hopeful for the future because of your pledge to address long-standing racial disparities and bring our divided nation together. But such change will require significant increases in federal spending to achieve equity as well as a fundamental shift in where we invest our resources, as delineated in this letter. With the inclusion of our budget priorities for Latinos, we look forward to a budget and appropriations process that, in the end, will reduce disparities and more fully include Latinos and their families in our government's priorities. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Murguía
President and CEO
UnidosUS