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## Rhode Island Latinos: A Scan of Issues Affecting the Latino Population of Rhode Island

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## Authors

Miren Uriarte, María Estela Carrión, Juan Carlos Gorlier, Charles Jones, Natalie Carithers, and Juan Francisco García





# RHODE ISLAND LATINOS

A Scan of Issues Affecting the  
Latino Population of Rhode Island

Miren Uriarte

with Maria Estela Carrion, Charles Jones, Natalie Carithers  
Juan Carlos Gorlier and Juan Francisco Garcia

Mauricio Gastón Institute

for Latino Community Development and Public Policy  
University of Massachusetts Boston

*Prepared for The Rhode Island Foundation – 2002*

## Foreword

The Rhode Island Foundation is pleased to have supported the work of the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston that has generated a wealth of new information on the Latino communities of Rhode Island. Over the last several years, the Directors and staff of the Foundation have come to appreciate again and again the importance of good information in community-strengthening activities. This fine research effort has allowed us to learn the “landscape” of Latino communities in our state, and it will also inform us as we develop strategies to strengthen those communities and the organizations that serve them. Finally, and perhaps most important, it will help us to measure and recognize success in these efforts.

An important additional product of the Gastón Institute’s work is the range of partnerships created by its skilled work in the community—links that will be essential to efforts to strengthen Latino communities. This is an important note to emphasize. The recommendations contained in this report are not calls for action by The Rhode Island Foundation or government or social service agencies alone. These recommendations speak to all of us, calling for the creation of new alliances and collaborative efforts designed to strengthen Latino families and communities throughout the region.

I would like to sincerely thank Miren Uriarte and her colleagues at the Gastón Institute. Their energy, insight, and dedication to building strong communities can serve as an inspiration for all of us.

Ronald V. Gallo, Ed.D.  
President & CEO  
The Rhode Island Foundation

## Acknowledgements

Over the last 20 years, the presence of Latinos in Rhode Island has changed the demographic profile of the state, and especially its capital, Providence. Such a transformation calls for thought and planning on the part of the myriad of stakeholders that develop strategy and policy for the state and the city. In the summer of 2001, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy received an invitation to present a proposal to assist in this process of thought and planning by developing information about the Latino community of the Rhode Island. We responded because knowing about the community, from the inside, is an important step in addressing the critical issues that this transformation entails.

The work of producing this document has been blessed by the support of Owen Heleen and Anna Cano-Morales of The Rhode Island Foundation and Luisa Murillo from CHisPA, who from the start collaborated with us in the design of the project. CHisPA staff members worked closely with us in data collection and with their support and feedback have kept us from the errors caused by distance and by being outsiders to this particular community. We thank them. If members of the Latino community of Rhode Island see themselves reflected in the document, this is because 78 members of the community gave us their time, their thoughts and their experience, from the heart. The 40 persons that participated in the focus groups and the 38 others that were interviewed for the project were eloquent and full of feeling about their experience and about their concern for their community. Without their collaboration, this report would be full of numbers and empty of soul.

Our thanks go to the Department of Education, the Providence School Department, and the Department of Health, all in Rhode Island, for providing data for this report. Finally, thanks go also to Andres Torres, Mary Jo Marion, Leslie Bowen and Dan Broberg of the Gastón Institute for supporting the design and completion of this work.

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# Introduction, Summary of Findings and Recommendations

**THE LATINO POPULATION** has grown dramatically in Rhode Island in the last two decades. This has been particularly the case in Central Falls and Providence where Latinos make up 48% and 30% of the population, respectively. This influx has created a shift in the racial/ethnic make up of these cities and in the cultural background of large sectors of the residents.

The arrival of large numbers of persons who do not speak English and who are not familiar with the structure and practice of public services would, under any circumstance, present a challenge. But the fact that they are recent newcomers and that they are mostly young and poor has made this challenge even more complex. The thrust of systems is towards stability and most resist and delay changes called for by demographic shifts, because it most often means transforming organizational cultures and practices and smoothing the way for institutions to begin to reflect the cultures and needs of the new populations. Quite often, in response to the resistance to integrate them, newcomers develop their own mechanisms of support and organize their own services. These never achieve the breadth of the established system, but they do provide the first order of formal support in these communities.

In Rhode Island, both the resistance to integrate the needs of Latinos to the institutional fabric of the state and the continued struggle of Latinos to organize social support, and develop political power in order to address their own needs is already a



part of the history of the state.

This study seeks to assess the situation of Latinos in Rhode Island: it is a scan of issues that throws a wide net and gathers information on broad range of areas. The guiding question was “What is known about Latinos in regards to...” areas such as the make-up of the community, the community’s major national subgroups, as well as more focused issues such as education, employment, housing, health and human services. In doing so, we have drawn on information from the Census, national and local studies and from state administrative sources.

But perhaps the most important question that underlies this study has been “How does Rhode Island and its Latino population move forward?” And so, for each area, we have tried to illuminate the major issues and problems and present some recommendations from the perspective of Rhode Island Latino leaders and members of the community as well as from providers of services to Latinos in each area.

The main findings and recommendations are summarized below. There are findings in 11 critical sectors. These include demographic and socio-economic patterns and characteristics of the population, where we present, among others, that Rhode Island Latinos are the youngest and poorest compared to other Latino populations in the region and findings in relationship to the current organizational environment in the community and its potential to meet service needs. There findings and recommendations in the areas of K through 12 education, higher education, jobs, small business development, housing and health and social support.

## Findings and Recommendations

### I. The Latino Population in Rhode Island Has Experienced Great Growth in the Last Decades.

The Latino population has increased from a total of 19,707 in 1980 to 45,752 in 1990 to 90,820 in 2000.

Foreign immigration and migration from Puerto Rico and from other states in the mainland US are the most important factors in the growth of the Latino population.

Latinos account for 8.7% of the population of the state of Rhode Island.

Latinos are highly concentrated in Providence, Central Falls and Pawtucket; 79% of all Latinos in Rhode Island live in those three cities. The densest concentration of Latinos occurs in Central Falls, where they account for 47.8% of the population. But most Latinos in Rhode Island live in Providence; 57% of the Latinos in the state live in

Providence. Here they account for 30% of the population of the city.

## 2. Most Latinos in Rhode Island Are Newcomers.

Forty-one percent of the Latino population is immigrant and 16% are migrants from Puerto Rico.

Eleven percent of the population migrated before 1980, 16% came to the US before 1980 and 1990 and 30% have come to the US since 1990.

Although there are persons from almost every Latin American country living in Rhode Island, the largest groups are Puerto Rican (27.9% of the Latino population), Dominican (19.7%), Guatemalan (9.9%), Colombians (6.3%) and Mexicans (6.5%).

Latinos came to Rhode Island both directly from their country of origin and from other cities in the US, primarily New York, cities in New Jersey and Hartford.

Immigrant families are reported to refrain from seeking services of all types: (1) because of lack of familiarity with the services since these may not have been available in the same way in their country of origin; (2) because of lack of knowledge of the existence and availability of the services and; (3) because, as newcomers, they may not know that they are entitled to any benefits.

A number of Latino immigrants in Rhode Island are undocumented.

The absence of legal status places immigrants in a position where he/she is forced to accept very marginal work, with conditions that are usually unacceptable to legal immigrant or native workers and which in some cases violates rights generally guaranteed American workers.

The undocumented do not qualify for any government program, including college financial aid.

Fear of discovery is part of the daily experience of the undocumented and keeps them away from health and human services, from the schools their children attend and even from community organizations. It keeps them from complaining about violations of housing law and workers' rights or about problems they may suffer with any service.

**Recommendation 1:** English language classes and support and guidance in understanding and navigating the new systems are basic areas need to be addressed more fully. Attention also needs to be paid to the language and cultural competence of public services.

**Recommendation 2:** Undocumented immigrants are often the target of abuse by landlords and employers. Advocacy leading to the enforcement of housing and workers'

rights laws is critical.

**Recommendation 3:** Students that are undocumented are not eligible for federal financial aid, are currently considered by the state colleges and universities as foreign students and are charged out-of-state tuition and fees, even though they are state residents. Advocacy leading to the designation of these persons as residents for the purposes of tuition would increase Latino access to higher education.

### 3. Latinos Are a Young Population.

With a median age of 23.6 years, Latinos are the youngest racial/ethnic group in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island Latinos have a lower median age than Latinos nationally and the lowest median age of any group of Latinos in the six New England states.

Sixty percent of the Latino population is under 30 years old, 43% are under 19. Fifty-four percent of the Latino children in Rhode Island are under 10 years old.

Latino children under 19 account for 13.8% of the child population of Rhode Island, 40.3% of that of Providence and more than half of all the children of Central Falls.

Among the Latino national groups, Dominicans are by far the youngest; children under 19 make up more than 50% of the Dominican population. They are followed by the Puerto Ricans, among whom 42.8% are children under 19. These two groups account for the lion's share of Latino children in Rhode Island.

Most Latino children in Rhode Island have been born in the US mainland.

The age structure of the Latino population points to a very strong presence of young families with children.

**Recommendation 4:** The small numbers of older adults suggests that the extended networks of older kin may be left behind. Recreating some of the elements of these systems of social support in this new context and connecting the young families to them will be an important source of support for these young families.

### 4. There is High Rate of Poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island Latinos of all ages, but particularly Latino children in Rhode Island, show rates of poverty that are well above those of Latinos nationally and in the Northeast.

Latino children account for 14% of all children in the state and 29.6% of children living in poverty.

Forty-one percent of Latino households with children under 18 live below the federal

poverty rate, a proportion that is 3.5 times that of the overall population of Rhode Island and six times that of whites. Latinos have the highest percentage of poor households of all groups in the state.

Comparison of poverty rates among the overall Latino population, Latino children under 19 and Latino workers in 1990 and 2000 show that in all cases, the rates of poverty declined for Latinos nationally during the 1990s but increased in Rhode Island during the same period. The greatest increase, 8.5 points, took place among Latino children under 19.

The effect of the large number of immigrants and newcomers among Latinos is frequently mentioned as an explanation for lower incomes and the higher rates of poverty among Latinos.

In Rhode Island, as is true nationally, the highest levels of poverty are found among the non-immigrant sectors of the Latino population: US born Latinos and Puerto Rican migrants.

Poverty among Latino immigrants is highest among recent immigrants: 57.6% of those that have been in the US only since 1995 were poor. But immigrants who had been in the US for 10 years, had rates of poverty similar to those of persons that have been in the US much longer.

Household income for Latinos in Rhode Island is lower than Latino household incomes nationally and regionally.

Household incomes vary widely depending on immigrant status and nationality.

Native born have higher percentage of persons among the highest income cohorts.

Dominicans tend to have the highest percentage of households earning \$50,000 or more; about 26% earn under \$15,000.

Puerto Ricans show a large percentage (52%) of persons earning less than \$15,000 but also a significant percent (23%) earn \$50,000 or more.

Forty percent of Latino households in Rhode Island are headed by a single adult. Latinos have the highest level of unemployment of any racial/ethnic group in the state. In 2000, the unemployment rate for Latinos was 2.28 times that of whites and higher than that of Blacks.

Poverty is often associated with low levels of educational attainment.

Latinos, as a group, have the lowest levels of educational attainment of any group in Rhode Island; 47.9% had an educational attainment of 12 grades or less compared to

17.2% of whites and 35.2% of Blacks.

Of the national groups, Dominicans have the lowest percentage of persons at the low levels of educational attainment. Central and South Americans show the highest percentages at this level.

**Recommendation 5:** High levels of poverty are associated with increased health problems, low educational achievement and increased vulnerability in almost every area of life. Guarantees of income and food, protection if housing becomes vulnerable, family supportive services, educational support for pre-schoolers and children in school, are critical services that address the worst effects of poverty.

**Recommendation 6:** The level and persistence of poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island warrants increased attention on the part of policymakers, researchers and Latino community leaders because of the impact of poverty on almost every area of life: education, health status, and the capacity for self-sufficiency and stability of families.

**Recommendation 7:** The complexity of factors related to poverty among Latinos requires multifaceted and comprehensive approaches to be effective. Among these are improvements in education, the development of employment and training programs that are integrated to industrial promotion strategies and affirmative action programs, the wide availability of ESL and Adult Basic Education programs and community economic development strategies that promote labor market success.

## 5. The Organizational Environment in the Community Favors Small Organizations Focused on Cultural and Recreational Activities and Strong Political and Electoral Participation.

There are many small cultural organizations, usually developed to promote and sustain the cultural traditions of the different Latin American nations from which Latinos come.

There is a new and active Latino Chamber of Commerce that provides a network for Latino small businessmen and women.

There is a strong tradition of Latino political activism in the community that has evolved into a strong electoral participation.

There are two long-standing service/advocacy organizations: Progreso Latino in Central Falls and the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA) in Providence.

At this point, there is not a strong network of community-based services geared to the Latino community. Community-based services usually rely on a partnership between internal community organizational resources and external financial resources. Although there has been brisk organizational process in the community, it appears that internal

organizational problems and inconsistent external financial resources have not promoted this organizational growth.

**Recommendation 8:** The availability of supportive, culturally compatible, easily-accessible community based services is a key factor in supporting Latino families and should be promoted and financially supported.

## 6. The Education of Latino Children

In 1999, Latino children accounted for 13% of the children in Rhode Island public schools. The number of Latino children is largest in Providence schools, but, proportionally, the presence of Latino children is densest in Central Falls, where they account for 60.3% of enrollments.

Comparing 2000 scores of Latinos in the 4th and 8th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress tests in math, science, reading and writing, a higher percentage of Rhode Island students tested below the basic level than students nationally and regionally. This was true in both grades and in all academic areas except 8th grade science. In 4th grade, less than one-third of Latino students attained the basic level of achievement in any of the subjects. In the 8th grade, the results were somewhat better: 64% attained this level in writing, 45% in reading and 31% in math.

Compared with other NAEP test-takers in Rhode Island, Latinos students also showed the lowest outcomes.

Data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Education show that in 2001, Latino drop out rates for the state stood at 36%, with higher percentages in Providence and Pawtucket.

The tendency in the last three years has been for the Latino drop out rates to increase.

Only 62% of Latino students graduate from high school, the lowest graduation rate of any racial/ethnic group in the state.

Latino educators and Latino leaders expressed that the climate in the schools and the approaches to teaching currently used with Latino students are not helping them learn. Most point to the fact that the dramatic changes in the racial/ethnic make-up of the student body in some Rhode Island schools appears to have left school staff unprepared and untrained to deal with the demands of such a vastly different set of students.

The home culture and the school culture experienced by Latino students do not tend support each other. There are gaps in the communication across cultures and languages, misperceptions about roles and responsibilities and lack of understanding of the process of adaptation many immigrant families are experiencing. Children are often the

managers and the mediators of the contradictory forces between school and home.

**Recommendation 9:** Improve the educational climate in the schools by increasing the academic expectations, containing the misplacement of Latino children in special education, developing curricula that are relevant to the lives of students.

**Recommendation 10:** Increase the capacity of experienced teachers in Rhode Island schools that have experienced large demographic transformations in their student bodies through professional development and programs that enhance cultural competence.

**Recommendation 11:** Brisk recruitment of culturally competent teaching staff who are also competent in their area of specialty is a priority in the Providence School Department that should be supported and replicated in other systems.

**Recommendation 12:** Provide Latino counselors in high schools with large Latino enrollments who can focus on drop out prevention.

**Recommendation 13:** Create effective mechanisms for the communication between parents and schools by: (1) addressing language barriers by making all official and unofficial communication with parents linguistically accessible; (2) providing translators (that are not the children) in parent-teacher encounters; and (3) developing mechanisms for effective discussion with parents of topics such as their responsibilities and rights in the oversight of their child's education.

**Recommendation 14:** Develop links between schools and community-based institutions and organizations with the purpose of supporting the educational endeavors of schools, of children, and of families. Possible initiatives include: (1) the development of cultural programs for youth by Latino community-based organizations that will help solidify their connection to the values of Latino culture and (2) the development of after-school programs for children of working parents that emphasize academic and homework support.

## 7. Improving Access to Higher Education

Low rates of graduation from high school, lack of support and encouragement at home and at school to continue education and difficulties in managing the admissions process are reasons for the low enrollments of Latinos in colleges and universities in Rhode Island.

**Recommendation 15:** Improve access of Latino students to higher education by: (1) improving the counseling process in the high schools; (2) developing access programs that will facilitate the process of admissions for students that are first generation college applicants; and (3) increasing the numbers of Latino faculty and staff and Rhode Island



colleges and universities that can act as pulls and supports for Latino students.

## 8. The Employment of Latinos

Most Latinos work in those areas of the economy where most jobs have been lost in Rhode Island. Forty-three percent of Latino workers are employed in manufacturing, the sector that experienced the sharpest decline in jobs in the last decade. Latinos work in low wage laborer and operator jobs in this sector.

The second area of industrial concentration for Latinos is in the fast growing service sector where 28.9% of Latino workers labor. Latinos work in hotels and cleaning services at low wages.

The presence of Latinos in government jobs is negligible, less than .01% of Latinos work in this sector.

Lack of English language proficiency was an important barrier to employment and high wages for Latinos.

There is evidence that there may be violations of workers' rights and anti-discrimination laws affecting Latino employment. Violation of minimum wage laws and have the right to be paid for work performed have been documented by United Community Workers in Progreso Latino in Central Falls. These violations seem to be particularly directed at undocumented workers, but not exclusively. There has been little action on the part of the Department of Employment and Training in this regard. Discrimination in access to jobs was also felt to be an important barrier to Latino employment.

There is little quantitative information about the availability and utilization of ESL, ABE and GED instruction at the state level by Latinos. Providers indicate that the demand greatly outstrips the availability of educational opportunities in this area.

Only two centers were known by respondents to provide job training to Latinos: the International Institute and the Institute for Labor Studies.

**Recommendation 16:** Increase the number of available slots in adult ESL, GED and Adult Basic Education, placing these additional slots in agencies with an established track record of serving Latinos. Slots should be open to undocumented Latinos.

**Recommendation 17:** Develop job training programs for work in the growing sectors of the Rhode Island economy. Job training should be linked to jobs and include training for positions beyond entry level. Child care must be made available to women trainees.

**Recommendation 18:** Support advocacy, education and enforcement efforts directed to the protection of workers' rights.

**Recommendation 19:** Because high levels of Latino poverty are so often associated with labor market disadvantage, research should be conducted that sheds light on the dynamics of Latinos' low outcomes in the Rhode Island economy and makes specific and regionally relevant recommendations to address the causes of this disadvantage.

## 9. Latino Businesses

Rhode Island has 2,186 Latino-owned business firms, with receipts of \$207 million and employing 1,890 persons.

Central and South Americans own 42.7% of the Latino businesses in the state while Dominicans own 34.9% and Puerto Ricans 7.7%.

The highest percentage of Latino firms, 36.8%, are found in the service industry. These appear to be very small firms employing one person, sometimes less.

The second highest number of firms is found among retail trade establishments. These are the *bodegas*, for example, and are also very small establishments, employing one or two people, but most employing only one.

Latino business owners have yet to see the benefits of fully participating in mainstream economic structures and often maintain a very informal infrastructure.

Because there is no specific emphasis on the needs of this group of businesses, federal and state business development programs that provide tax incentives and technical assistance to small businesses in the area have been only marginally successful.

Informational materials are not linguistically accessible.

It is often difficult to comply with requirements of participation since they often involve activities during business hours of owners that run essentially one-person firms.

**Recommendation 20:** Support and build the capacity of Latino businesses by: (1) providing linguistically accessible materials in all areas; (2) developing capacity building activities that are accessible and relevant to small businesspeople; and (3) address topics such as tax responsibilities, accounting and record keeping, regulatory requirements, credit and management skills.

**Recommendation 21:** Logistically and financially support the development of a strong voice for Latino businesses.

## 10. Housing Latinos

Home ownership rates for Latinos in the state, at 21.3%, are below those of Latinos nationally and in New England. The highest rate of homeownership is taking place

among Latinos in Providence, where 19.8% own their homes. In Central Falls, close to 88.2% of Latinos are renters.

The dependency of Latinos on rental housing is a key area of vulnerability for this community, particularly in light of the rise in rents, especially in Providence.

In 2001, Rhode Island Kids Count reported that a family of three living below the federal poverty level in Providence, would spend 61% of its income in housing. Forty-one percent of Latino households are likely to spend this percentage of their income for housing.

In a 27-city survey conducted by the US Conference of Mayors in 2001, Providence had the largest number of homeless families reported, an increase of 20% over the previous year. Of these, 25% were Hispanic, 46% were Black and 22% were white. Homelessness among Latinos in Rhode Island occurred at almost twice the rate as that found in the sample of the 27 cities.

Latino leaders and providers express that there is evidence that Latinos experience strong barriers in obtaining public and Section 8 housing in Rhode Island:

Materials are not linguistically accessible;

There are few persons that speak Spanish in the offices and there is no translation provided, and there is no evident effort being made to improve access on the part of Latinos to these programs;

There is also evidence that Latinos are discriminated against in rental housing. Persons discriminated in this way seldom complain to proper authorities, some because they are undocumented and fear discovery and others because they are unaware of their rights as tenants. Landlord abuse is particularly prevalent against undocumented persons;

Although homeownership is a goal for many, there are barriers here as well. There is little information in Spanish about the mechanics of home ownership and few places provide assistance in Spanish for the process of finding and purchasing a home.

**Recommendation 22:** Remedy the barriers Latinos face in obtaining public and Section 8 housing by taking affirmative steps to inform them of eligibility and of the process for qualifying for this type of housing support.

**Recommendation 23:** Support advocacy and enforcement of fair housing laws being violated in the rental of housing for Latinos.

**Recommendation 24:** Support a process of community-based education around tenants' rights and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 25:** Support educational efforts directed to increase the numbers of homeowners and improve their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in regards to credit, utilities, etc.

## 11. Health and Social Support

Aside from health indicators, there is little information available on the quality of life experienced by Latinos in Rhode Island.

Latinos seem to be avoiding risky health behavior in greater proportion than the overall population: they have a lower incidence of adult smokers, of overweight persons, of adult drinkers, and of young people that drink alcohol or smoke marijuana. Latinos also have a lower incidence of hepatitis B and a similar incidence of low birth weights babies than the general population.

Conditions usually associated with poverty are significantly exacerbated among Latinos. The incidence of tuberculosis is twice as high as that of the general population and the rate of infant mortality, at 9.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, is 50% higher than that found in the general population.

Latinos experience stress and confusion derived lack of familiarity with systems of all types. Most salient among these are information about:

- The functioning of the immigration system;

- Information about health care and health insurance. Latinos are often unfamiliar with how to obtain insurance, what insurance pays for, how to make complaints about lack of coverage or bad service;

- Information about the educational system, the expectations of students and parents, and the rights students and parents have vis a vis the system;

- Information about programs in higher education and the process of admissions and financial aid;

- Information about availability, eligibility and requirements of participation in ESL, ABE and GED programs as well as job training programs;

- Eligibility for benefits such as welfare, food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, public housing, Section 8 housing, etc;

- Information about Latinos' rights as workers, tenants and recipients of public services;

Information about the US cultural norms and expectations regarding discipline of children and the rights of children vis a vis the parents; and

Information about where to go in an emergency or when a family member needs mental health care.

Latinos appear to be experiencing urgent needs in:

The gamut of support necessary to assure a good quality of life for the people living with AIDS;

Support for families and children, going from the informational programs mentioned above to supportive and treatment services for issues ranging from family conflicts derived from the immigration experience to adolescent adjustment issues, drug and alcohol use by family members and family violence;

Mental health support of all types for both chronic and acute cases.; and

Support and treatment for families whose children are in the custody of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

**Recommendation 26:** Improve access to information on availability and eligibility along all areas of service and include information of their rights of as tenants, as workers and as recipients of public services.

**Recommendation 27:** Examine closely the programmatic need of Latinos in the areas of care to AIDS patients, families and children services, and mental health and implement appropriate programs to address these needs.

**12. The lack of available services at the community level and the linguistic and cultural barriers present in the established service system result in severe under-service to Latinos across the range of human services.**

When one examines access to care from the perspective of indicators, the problems of access experienced by Latinos appear to be manageable. But focus group discussions and interviews with Latino leaders suggest that access to services is a serious problem for the community. Focus group participants did not seem to be either frequently using health services or to be informed about them. Participants also seemed to have little personal experience with social services.

A closer look at the service environment for Latinos reveals that it consists of services by small, community-based agencies that provide the first line of formal support. Progreso Latino, CHisPA, the International Institute, programs in churches and other

community-based organizations spend a significant amount of time carrying out basic orientation and referral, case management and other basic services.

At this point, these service organizations are concentrated in Providence and Central Falls and offer a limited array of services beyond case management and referral.

The established service system—made up of state agencies and mainstream private non-profit organizations—offers a broad scope of services and in general, the quality of these services is perceived as good by Latinos but it is largely out of the reach of many Latinos, particularly those that do not speak English.

Although in the last few years there has been some improvement, there appears to be very little collaboration between the Latino-oriented, community-based services and the established service system in the Rhode Island.

Barriers of language and culture are important stumbling blocks in the use of these mainstream services by Latinos. Latino leaders, providers to Latinos and potential service users expressed that:

There is lack of information about programs available in Spanish.

There is inconsistent availability of trained translators in public services, hospitals, courts, and in non-profit services. There is a practice of use of untrained staff and even children as translators.

There is significant lack of understanding of Latino culture, including aspects of the culture pertinent to effective service delivery.

There is very sparse presence of Latino staff.

Economic barriers, primarily reflected in low rates of health insurance are a barrier to the use of health services by Latino adults.

The Latino community-based organizations present barriers of geography and availability of services.

Latino service organizations are located in Central Falls and Providence only. For the widest array of direct services, persons must travel to Central Falls, where Progreso Latino offers services that include childcare, programs for youth and the elderly and English language and ABE classes.

In spite of these offerings, there is a limited breadth of services available because of lack of financial resources and staff.

Services in Latino agencies are not sufficient for the demand presented by Latinos.

There are waiting lists and a growing unmet demand for night and weekend services.

**Recommendation 28:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the level of service use and the problems of access to services faced by the Latino population of Rhode Island.

**Recommendation 29:** Either through legislation or by changes in administrative practice provide for trained translators in public services and in health and human services.

**Recommendation 30:** Promote and support the development of cultural competence in public services and in the delivery of services by private non-profit agencies.

**Recommendation 31:** Promote and support the hiring of Latino staff in public services and in private non-profit agencies.

**Recommendation 32:** Support the development of culturally and linguistically accessible services at the community level by: (1) strengthening the organizational and service capacity of Latino community-based agencies and other organizations with a track record of serving Latinos effectively; (2) leveraging state contracts and private funding for the development of an appropriate range of services, including case management services, adult education and job training, family support and counseling, youth recreational and academic support programs, and health prevention programs; and (3) supporting the development of the leadership of staff and boards of directors of Latino community-based organizations as well as of Latino service professionals.

This report begins with an analysis of the demographic changes in the state drawing from the 2000 US Census as well as from a sample of the Current Population Survey; it is written by Miren Uriarte and Charles Jones.

The next section is a historical overview of the Latino community of Rhode Island written by Marta Martinez. She approaches this history through the lens of the arrival and development of five major Latino groups (Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians, Guatemalans, and Mexicans).

The third and longest section of this report, authored by Uriarte, Maria Estela Carrion and Jones, is divided in two parts: the first part focuses on four overarching issues that characterize the community: its youth, its over-representation of newcomers, the high incidence of poverty, and the efforts of the community to organize to meet its needs. The second part focuses on the specific issues of education, higher education, jobs, small businesses, housing and health and social support services. Both draw on the Census, the sample of the Current Population Survey, and state administrative data as well as interviews with Latino leaders and providers and focus groups with members of the community. A full description of the sources of data is also part of this section of the report; three appendices round out our methodological discussion.



Finally, a brief piece by Uriarte and Natalie Carithers provides some insight on the issues related to access to services for Latinos.



Miren Uriarte and Charles Jones, University of Massachusetts Boston

# Latinos in Rhode Island: Growth and Geographic Concentration

**DURING THE LAST 50 YEARS**, the New England region has been catching up with the racial/ethnic diversity of the rest of the country. For most of its history, this region has experienced diversity in its ethnic make-up but has remained largely homogenous racially. The experience of race relations in the South; the Mexican, Asian,<sup>1</sup> and Black presence in the West; and the explosion of ethno-diversity in the New York region had largely bypassed New England. There had always been a Native American presence in the region and small pockets of African-Americans in Hartford, New Haven and Boston dating back to the Revolutionary period, but it was not until the last part of the 20th Century, with the large migration of African-Americans from the South after World War II, that the region's physiognomy would begin to change. The migration of Latinos<sup>2</sup> which began in the 1960s, and that of Asians beginning in the 1980s underscored this transformation.

The state of Rhode Island has not been exempt from these regional trends. There are two stories that tell the tale of this change. The first is the fact that in the last decade there was a decrease in the white population of the state, not only as a proportion of the total population but in actual numbers. There are 37,676 fewer white persons in Rhode Island today than there were in 1990. This pattern is found in New England as a whole, fueled by losses of 4.2% of the white population of each Connecticut and Rhode Island and 1.6% of that of Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup>

The second story is that there has been a remarkable increase in the racial/ethnic

minority population of the state. Across New England the number of racial/ethnic minority residents increased by 55%; in Rhode Island, that increase was 42%. Since 1980, the share of the population of Rhode Island that is not white has increased from 6.6% to 18.1% (in 2000). In those 20 years, Blacks increased their numbers by about 50% and raised their proportion of the population from 2.8 to 4%. Asians began to make their presence felt in the area, accounting today for 2.2% of the population. But the lion's share of the growth in the minority population is accounted for by the increase of the Latino population. Since 1980, Latinos have quadrupled their share of the population of the state. Today they account for almost 9% of the total popula-

**Table I**

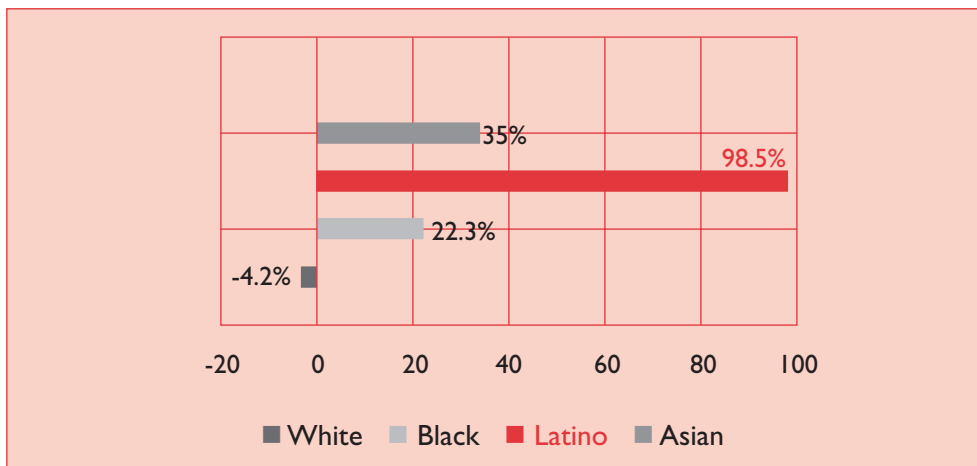
Population by Race and Ethnicity – Rhode Island, 1980, 1990 and 2000. (%)

Race/Ethnicity	Census 2000		Pooled 1999, 2000, 2001 CPS			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Sum of Weights	Weighted Percent
Total	1,019,092*	100.0%*	3,772	100.0%	2,810,270.28	100.0%
Latino	90,820	8.9%	340	9.0%	153,558.54	5.5%
White	858,433	84.2%	3,177	84.2%	2,439,471.58	86.8%
Black	41,922	4.1%	141	3.7%	121,279.64	4.3%
Am. Indian/ Alaskan Nat	4,181	0.4%	19	0.5%	81,637.77	2.9%
Asian and Pac. Is	23,736	2.3%	95	2.5%	14,322.75	0.5%

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1983; 1990 (a); 2000 (a)

**Figure I**

Rate of Population Growth.



Source: US Bureau of the Census 1990 (a) and 2000 (a)

tion and for 48% of the racial/ethnic minority population of the state. In the last decade, the increase in the Latino population accounted for all of the state's population increase and then some. Without the influx of Latinos, Rhode Island would have experienced negative population growth.<sup>4</sup>

This report focuses on the patterns of growth and settlement in the state. We focus first on population patterns because the rapid growth of new immigrant populations has implications for the process of community development of the groups as well as for the effectiveness of the systems of service that support them. The analysis of these patterns will frame subsequent discussion of service needs and of challenges facing institutions addressing the complex situation of the Latino community in Rhode Island.

## I. The Growth of the Latino Population

A rapidly growing Latino population has been a fact in Rhode Island since the 1970s. In that decade, Puerto Ricans and Colombians made their way to the state, the former resettling from New York's large Puerto Rican community and the latter arriving directly from their country of origin. Dominicans and Central Americans followed them in the 1980s. Between 1970 and 1980 and then again between 1980 and 1990, Rhode Island experienced one of the highest rates of Latino population growth in the country.<sup>5</sup>

The rate of growth of Latinos in the Ocean State far outstrips that of the region. The population of Latinos in Rhode Island grew at a rate of 98.5% compared to 54% for New England and to 57.9% for the United States.<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts, with almost half a million Latinos, has the largest Latino population in New England. But both Connecticut and Rhode Island have a denser presence of Latinos in their populations.

What is fueling this growth? Although births account for growth in the Latino population of Rhode Island, a more important factor has been the migration of Latinos into the state. According to analyses of a pooled sample of the *Current Population Survey* for 1999 to 2001 conducted for this report, more than half (57%) of the Latinos living in Rhode Island are either migrants born in Puerto Rico or immigrants born in another country in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> The migration of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland is considered an internal migration because Puerto Ricans are US citizens. Latino immigrants have come from all countries in Latin America but, according to the US Bureau of the Census, the highest numbers have come from the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Guatemala.<sup>8</sup> This coincides with information from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which reports that in 1997 and 1998 immigrants from these three countries accounted for the largest number of entrants who, upon arrival, chose

Rhode Island as their intended residence.<sup>9</sup>

Latinos have come to New England recruited to work in agriculture and manufacturing.<sup>10</sup> This recruitment, which began in the 1950s, started a chain of migration that first brought workers' families and then large numbers of other Latino migrants and immigrants to the region. Oral histories collected as part of the Latino Archive of the Hispanic Heritage Committee of Rhode Island by Marta Martinez of the Rhode Island Historical Society provide evidence that this was the case in Rhode Island as well. Our second report on this series, Marta Martinez's *The Latinos of Rhode Island* documents the process of arrival and settlement of the state's major Latino groups.

Census data provide some indication that the Latino community consists of a core of residents that have been in the area for more than 20 years and that about one third of the community are newcomers who have been here less than 10 years. The combination of older and newer immigrant cohorts have proven to be a source of strength for some immigrant communities. The tendency is for the more established immigrants

**Table 2**  
Latino Population – Rhode Island, 1970 to 2000.

Race/Ethnic Group	1980	1990	2000
White	93.4	89.3	81.9
Black or African American	2.8	3.4	4.0
Hispanic or Latino	2.1	4.6	8.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	n/a	1.8	2.3
American Indian or Alaskan Native	n/a	0.4	0.4
Other Races	1.7	1.0	3.1 <sup>1</sup>

Sources: US Bureau of the Census, 2000(a) and Rivera, 1991

**Table 3**  
Latinos as a percent of the population of the United States,  
New England and Selected New England States – 1990 and 2000.

Region	2000	1990
United States	12.5	9.0
New England	6.3	4.3
Connecticut	9.4	6.5
<b>Rhode Island</b>	8.7	4.6
Massachusetts	6.8	4.8
Other NE States	<2	<1

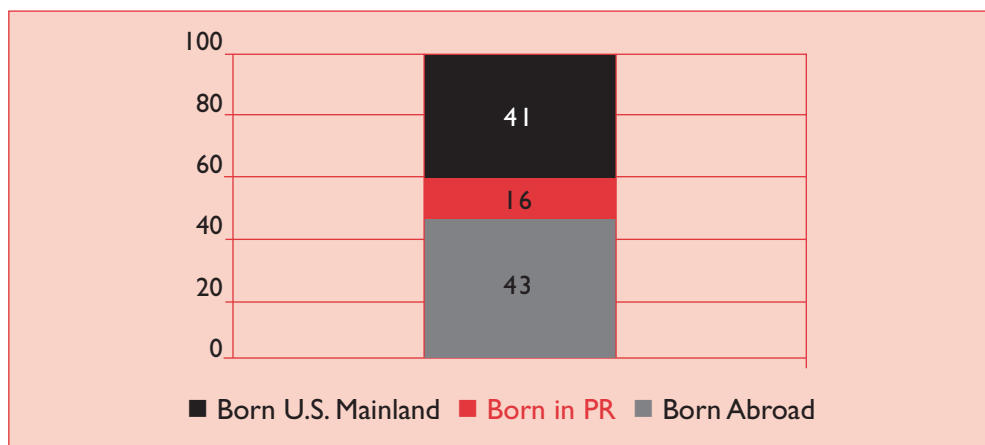
Source: US Bureau of the Census 1990(a) and 2000(a)

to provide a social and economic infrastructure that supports the incorporation of the newer ones.

In the case of Rhode Island, we can have some indication of the make-up of the cohorts within the community by looking at the time of arrival in the US of the Latino population. Figure 3 shows that 43% of Latinos were born in the US. Eleven percent of the Latino population arrived more than 20 years ago from Puerto Rico or another Latin American country. Of these, about 50% are Central and South American (Colombians)

**Figure 2**

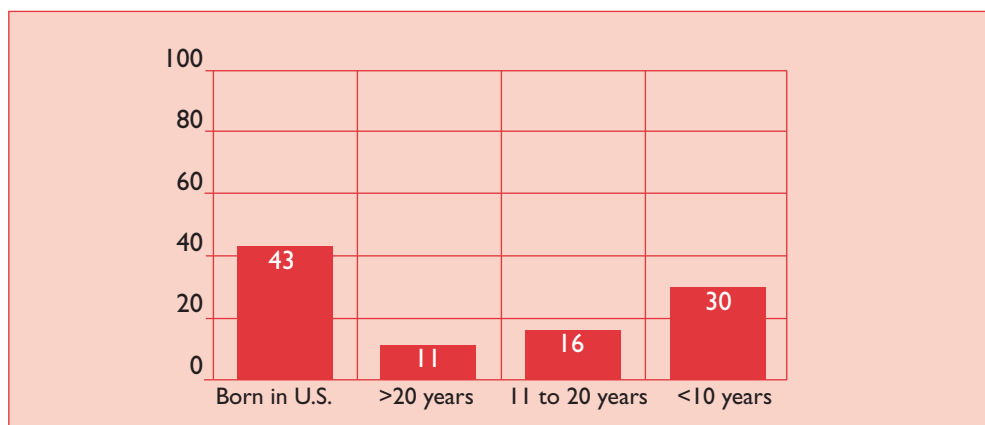
Nativity of Rhode Island's Latino Population – 2000. (%)



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

**Figure 3**

Make up of the Latino population: Born in the US and immigrants by time of arrival – Rhode Island, 2000.11 (%)



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

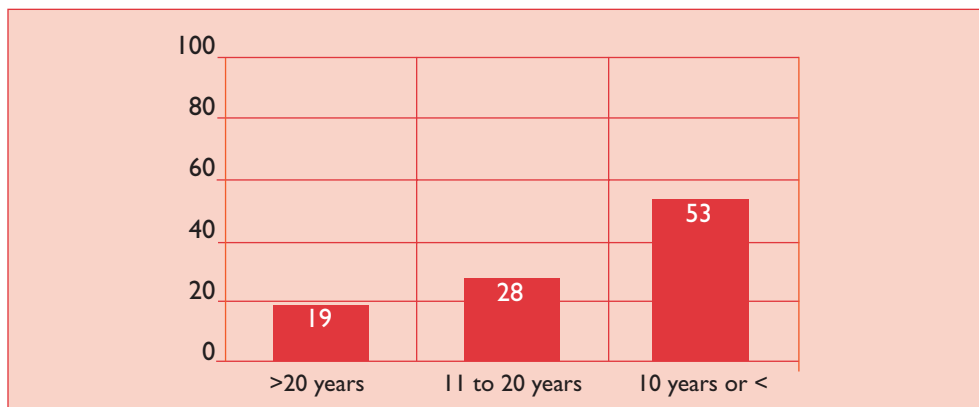
and one third are Puerto Ricans. Figure 4 shows the tenure in the US of immigrants and migrants within in the Latino population and underscores that about one of every five have been in the US for more than 20 years. This is the core of experienced immigrants in this community.

But the same data points to the presence of a large sector of newcomers. Thirty percent of the Latino population of Rhode Island has come to the US within the last 10 years, as is shown in Figure 3. Of the immigrants and migrants, shown in Figure 4, 53% have come in the last 10 years; 25% have done so since 1995. This points to a sizeable flow of new immigrants and migrants and significant presence of newly-arrived immigrants. Considering that many of these immigrants could have small children that have been born since the family's arrival in the US, it is likely that these figures under-represent the numbers of Latinos living in recently-arrived immigrant families. The largest representations among the newcomers are from Central and South America (mostly Guatemalans), the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Puerto Rico.

But, although their tenure in the US is short, there are indications that Latinos arrive in Rhode Island with some experience of having lived elsewhere in the United States. When Latinos were asked by the Current Population Survey if they had moved to their current address within the last year,<sup>12</sup> 8.8% had done so from outside the state. Of these, 79% had moved from elsewhere in the United States. The Central and South Americans groups were more likely to arrive directly to Rhode Island from their countries of origin, while Dominicans more frequently came from elsewhere in the US, most likely from New York City's large Dominican community.

**Figure 4**

Tenure in the US of Latino immigrant and migrant population – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)



The fact that a much larger proportion of Latinos begin their life elsewhere in the US indicates that although it has been the recipient of large number of Latinos in the last two decades, Rhode Island is not an initial “gateway” for Latinos. In a gateway (or “port of entry”) area, large numbers of newcomers arrive directly from their country of origin and without any prior experience of life in the US, as is the case of cities like Miami, Los Angeles, New York and, to a much lesser extent, Boston. Rhode Island has been less exposed to the forceful and visible impact of the direct entry of large numbers of totally inexperienced newcomers. A more subtle entry, on the other hand, may contribute to both the invisibility of the newcomers to those outside their areas of settlement and the lack of readiness on the part of the receiving city’s systems of care to address the needs of the new immigrants.

## II. Geographic Concentration of the Latino Population

The long-standing Latino community that has lived in Rhode Island for more than 20 years is made up primarily of Puerto Ricans and Colombians who have settled in Providence and Central Falls. To this day, these are areas of high concentration of Latinos. Providence later became the entry point for Dominicans and Central Americans as well. Table 3 and the maps in Figure 5 and 6, show that in 2000, Latinos are present in several small pockets across the state, but that they are highly concentrated in the Greater Providence area, particularly in Providence, Central Falls, and Pawtucket.

Providence is home to the largest number of Latinos, where they make up about 30%

**Table 3**

Latino population of selected Rhode Island cities – 2000.

Place	Latino population	Percent of total population	Percent of Latino population
State	90,820	8.7	100
Providence	52,146	30.0	57.4
Pawtucket	10,141	13.9	11.2
Central Falls	9,041	47.8	10.0
Woonsocket	4,030	9.3	4.4
Cranston	3,613	4.6	4.0
Newport	1,467	5.5	1.6
Warwick	1,372	1.6	1.5
North Providence	1,247	3.8	1.4

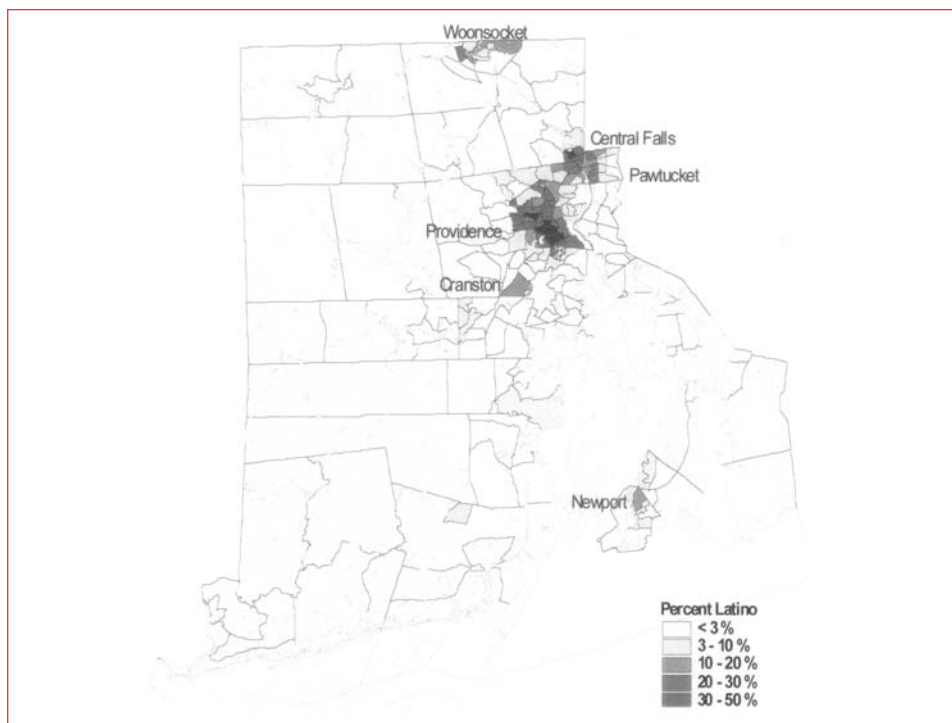
Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

of the population of the city. By contrast, Blacks account for 12.7% of the city's population and Asians comprise 5.9%.<sup>13</sup> Latinos are also the largest racial/ethnic group in Providence, accounting for 55% of the minority population. In Providence, the Latino presence is densest in the neighborhoods of Elmwood, the West End, and South Providence. In those areas, Latinos account for more than 50% of the population (see Figure 7). The concentration of Latinos in geographically contiguous areas in the city has made it possible for them to field candidates for office and get them elected. "At this point, we have four neighborhoods in Providence that are almost all Latino," says a Latino elected official from Providence, "although more than Latinos vote in those districts and those elected have to represent everyone, it helps make the process of getting elected much easier."<sup>14</sup>

The two other areas of high concentration—Central Falls and Pawtucket—are small in comparison to Providence. They are both about one-fifth of the size of the Providence group. In Central Falls, the Latino presence is dense, even more concentrated than that found in Providence. Latinos account for 47.8% of Central Falls and comprise 82%

**Figure 5**

Geographic concentration of Latino population in Rhode Island – 2000.



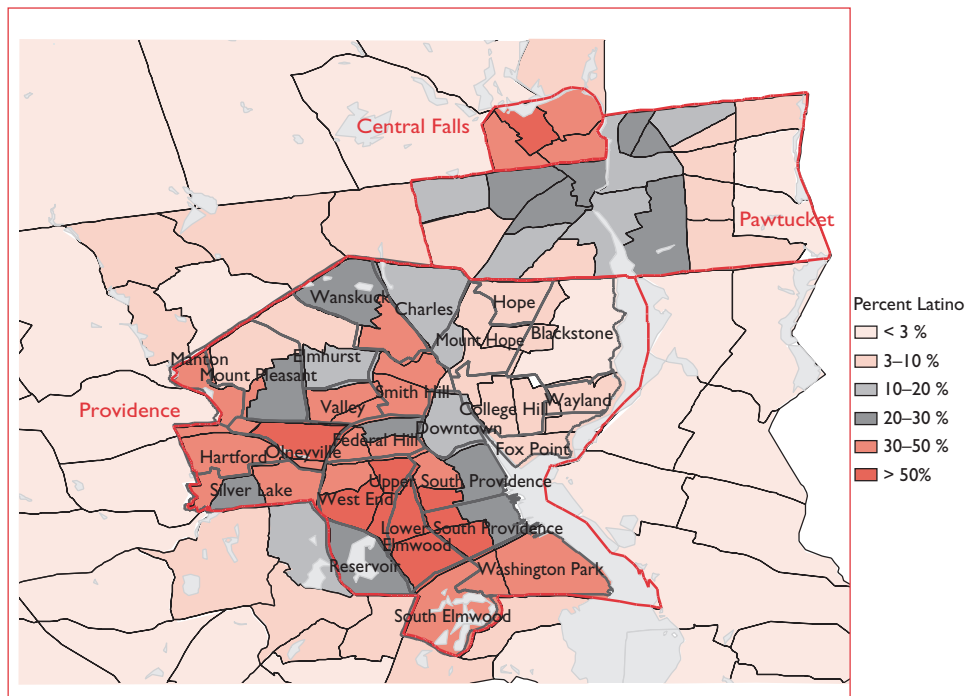
Sources: Population counts: US Bureau of the Census 2000a Geography Data: US Bureau of the Census 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (via Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com))

of its minority population. Pawtucket has slightly more Latinos, but they are less concentrated than those in either Providence or Central Falls. Other cities in the state that have at least 1,000 Latinos are Woonsocket, Cranston, Newport, Warwick and North Providence.

Although the racial makeup of the state of Rhode Island remains overwhelmingly white (81.9% in 2000), the last 20 years have dramatically altered the face of its state capital. In the year 2000, for the first time, whites became the numerical minority of the Providence population. This is the result of, both, the decrease in the white population of the city and of the migration of Latinos into the capital. Between 1980 and 2000, Providence lost 35% of its non-Hispanic white population, declining from a high of 123,222 persons in 1980 to 79,451 in 2000. During the same years, the Black population remained stable at between 11 and 12%; the population of Asians and other races doubled, and the Latino population quintupled.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 6**

Concentration of the Latino population in Greater Providence.



Sources: Population counts: US Bureau of the Census 2000a  
 Geography Data: US Bureau of the Census 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (via  
 Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com)

## Conclusions

In the last 20 years Rhode Island, and particularly Providence, has experienced considerable changes in the make-up of its population. At the heart of this change is the large migration of Latinos to the state. The rate of growth of the Latino population in Rhode Island far outstrips that of the New England region. Providence, for example, has attained a high level of racial diversity in a very short period of time. It surpasses Boston and Hartford in the density of its minority population, both cities with longer-standing Black and Latino communities.

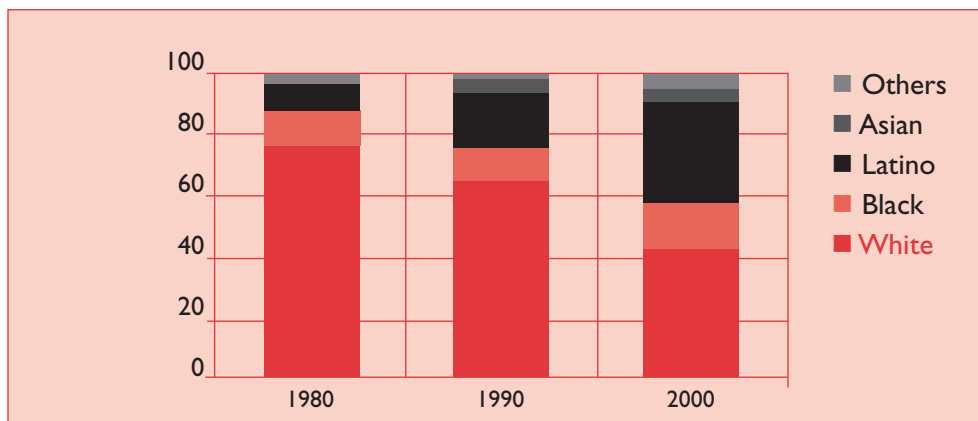
Immigration from Latin America and Puerto Rico fuels Latino population growth. Although a large number of Latinos in Rhode Island were born in the mainland US and, even among immigrant Latinos, there is a long-standing community, the felt experience and the numbers reflect a large number of relatively recently-arrived immigrants.

Either one, the arrival of a large number of immigrants or the swift racial transformation of a city, would have brought stresses and strains. In Rhode Island, and especially in Providence, both are happening at the same time. The rapid racial transformation of the population is often the source of stress as systems and structures resist and lag behind in their response to the demographic changes. The entry of large numbers of immigrants often require supportive services and initiatives that are seldom readily available in cities that are not traditional “ports of entry” or where large immigrant communities of the same group are already well established.

There is evidence to suggest that both—the effect of the change in racial composition and the impact on the service systems of a large number of new immigrants—are part

### Figure 7

Evolving racial diversity of Providence, Rhode Island – 1980 to 2000.



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1983; 1990 (a); 2000 (a)

of the experience of Latinos in the Ocean State. This is because as they start a new life in Rhode Island, in many ways, the state and, especially, Providence is starting a new day as well.

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Martha Martinez, Rhode Island Historical Society

# The Latinos of Rhode Island

**THE 2000 CENSUS SHOWS** that 90,820 individuals in Rhode Island listed themselves as Latino. The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic,” although a means to underscore the commonality of their Latin American heritage and Spanish language, hide vast diversity. Most Latinos, when referring to themselves within their community, tend to use their nationality as an expression of identity. That is because where they come from makes a difference. There are historical differences; differences in the racial/ethnic make-up of the groups; and cultural differences that are reflected in the food, the music and the art of the different groups. There are sharp differences in the reasons for migrating to the United States—from the professionals from Argentina and the rest of the Southern Cone to the Cuban refugees, who are here for different reasons than the refugees from Central America. Mexicans cross porous borders into lands that were part of Mexico 150 years ago; they still remember them as their own. Dominicans come looking for work as do Puerto Ricans, but their situations could not be more different. The latter are born citizens and arrive in the mainland as easy as any of us flies from Providence to Miami or Chicago. Dominicans, on the other hand, migrate here using many different roads and experiencing great difficulties.

Latinos in Rhode Island come from almost all countries in Latin America, with the top five nationalities as follows: Puerto Ricans (25,422), Dominicans (17,894), Guatemalans (8,949), Mexicans (5,881), and Colombians (5,706). Puerto Ricans are the second largest group of Latinos in the United States and the largest group in New



England, where they account for almost half of the Latino population. Except for Maine, where Mexicans account for the largest percentage of the Latino population, Puerto Ricans are the largest group of Latinos in each individual state as well. In Rhode Island, they account for 28% of the Latino population. The Dominicans are the second largest group in Rhode Island. Their concentration in the Ocean State is the densest of any state in the New England region. The same is true of the Central and South Americans, of which we also find their densest presence in Rhode Island. The range of Latino groups is more evenly represented in Rhode Island than in any other state in the region.

This report focuses on the diversity of the Latino population of Rhode Island through its history and their settlement in the region. We provide a view of the diverse experience of the national groups that compose the Latino population, focusing primarily on the five most numerous nationalities present in Rhode Island: the Puerto Ricans, the Dominicans, the Colombians, the Guatemalans and the Mexicans.

## I. The Puerto Ricans

Puerto Ricans are the second largest Spanish-speaking group in the United States. They are American citizens by birth. Their movement to and from Puerto Rico is considered part of the internal migration of Americans, and not “immigration” per se, as is the case of Mexicans, Cubans, Salvadorians and all other Hispanic peoples. The first major wave of migration to the mainland did not begin until the early 1900s. Puerto Ricans

**Table I**

National Groups, Latino Population – United States, New England and Selected New England States, 2000.

	<b>United States</b>	<b>New England</b>	<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>Massachusetts</b>
All Latino / Hispanic	35,305,818	875,225	90,820	320,323	428,729
Mexican	58.5	6.9	6.5	7.3	5.2
Puerto Rican	9.64	49.0	28.0	60.7	46.5
Cuban	3.5	2.1	1.2	2.2	2.1
Dominican Republic	2.2	9.0	19.7	3.0	11.6
Central American	4.8	7.3	12.5	4.1	8.9
South American	3.8	8.1	9.5	9.8	6.5
Other Hispanic or Latino <sup>2</sup>	17.6	16.7	22.6	12.9	19.1

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000(b)

were brought to the United States to fill a need for farm workers, and many of the migrants went directly to Arizona, Texas and California. A larger number went to the Northeast to states like Connecticut to work in agricultural farms, harvesting tobacco and sugar cane.<sup>16</sup>

## The Puerto Ricans in Rhode Island

The first Puerto Ricans who came to Providence did so in the 1920s. They moved to Providence and the surrounding areas to find work in the manufacturing industry. Estimates of how many Hispanic people were living in Rhode Island before this time are complicated by the lack of information found in federal census records, which were not necessarily broken down by ethnic group.<sup>17</sup> One historian in Rhode Island has suggested that an increase in Puerto Rican migration was first evidenced in the late 1950s.<sup>18</sup> However, further research reveals that Puerto Ricans began emigrating from that island to Rhode Island in the 1920s when dozens of Puerto Rican migrant workers were brought here to work on farms located in the Elmwood neighborhood of Providence. One such individual was Julio Casiano, who at the age of 22 came to Rhode Island in the spring of 1926. According to Casiano, he and a group of men were brought here by Jewish landowners to help out in farms every spring, and were then allowed to return to Puerto Rico just before the cold weather arrived. At the time,

**Table 2**

National groups, Latino population – Rhode Island, 2000.

Group	Population	% of Latino Population
All Latinos or Hispanics	90,820	—
Puerto Rican	25,422	27.99
Dominican	17,894	19.70
Central American	11,320	12.46
Guatemalan	8,949	9.85
Salvadoran	1,206	1.33
Other Central American	1,165	1.28
South American	8,666	9.54
Colombian	5,706	6.28
Bolivian	961	1.06
Ecuadorian	544	0.6
Other South American	1,455	1.60
Mexicans	5,881	6.48
Cubans	1,128	1.24
Other Hispanics or Latinos <sup>1</sup>	20,509	22.58

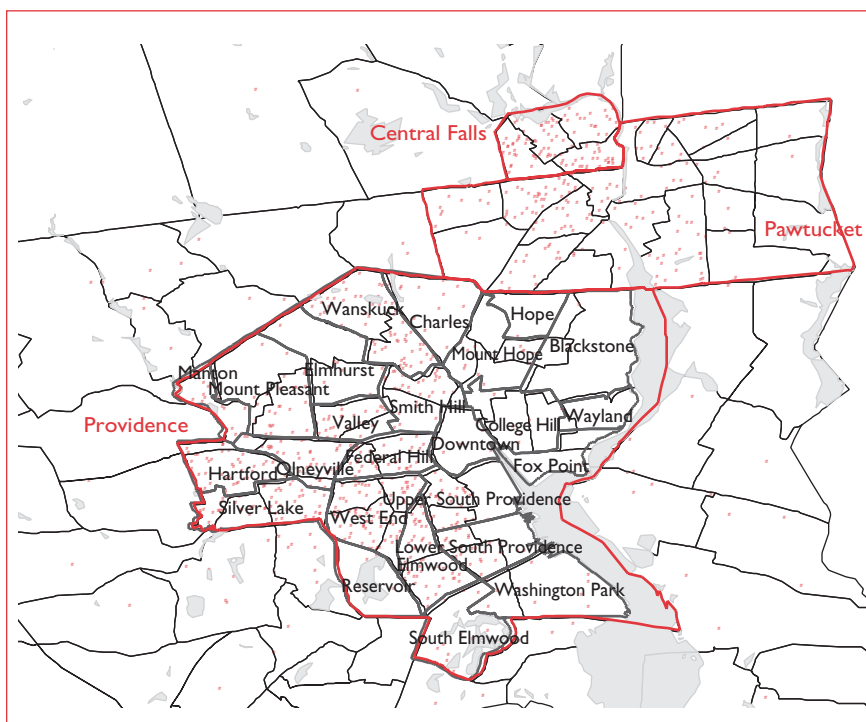
Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000(b)

Casiano and the other Puerto Rican workers felt that economic opportunities were greater here than in their homeland. However, despite the opportunities offered to them, Casiano says that the majority of the men would return to Puerto Rico because they were not accustomed to the cold weather. During that same period, many Puerto Ricans also found their way to Newport, Bristol and places in South County to work in nurseries.<sup>19</sup>

Most of today's Puerto Ricans came to Rhode Island by way of New York, migrating here between 1945 and 1970. Many of them were impoverished, unemployed, or underemployed and came from rural and urban areas of the island. Most came with a minimal education. Lacking skills and training, the Puerto Ricans found work in the garment industry, restaurants or other service jobs in New York City. Work in the manufacturing industry was readily available to the Puerto Rican migrants because it required little or no English skills.<sup>20</sup>

## Map I

Concentration of Puerto Ricans in Greater Providence.



Sources: Population counts: Census Bureau 2000a

Geography Data: Census Bureau 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (viaGeography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com))

Neighborhoods: The Providence Plan (unpublished correspondence)

Puerto Rican workers and their families settled in some of New York's overcrowded and crime-ridden neighborhoods, such as East Harlem and the Bronx. When they ventured beyond New York's borders, they found the living conditions in cities like Providence to be far superior to those in New York, especially if they were raising children. One Puerto Rican business owner on Broad Street in the Southside of Providence who had lived in the Bronx in the 1970s remembers the time he visited his niece in Rhode Island. His wife had recently given birth, and when they saw how quiet and safe it was in Providence compared to their lives in New York, the couple decided to move here.<sup>21</sup>

Stronger evidence shows that the peak of Puerto Rican migration to this area took place in the 1980s. Records show that many of the Puerto Ricans who migrated to Providence before the 1980s did not find many other Puerto Ricans here. Adjusting to this change was often difficult for people who had just come from Puerto Rico, or more likely from New York, because most had previously been surrounded by large numbers of other Puerto Ricans, with whom they shared language, culture, food and music. Many took for granted the fact that their culture was the norm. Moving to Providence was a rude awakening for many Puerto Ricans who also experienced some culture shock. Until the 1970s, it was hard to find Hispanic food, music and other cultural necessities in Rhode Island, and those who did not speak English had an especially hard time because very few state and social services agencies employed bilingual workers. Something as essential as getting one's driver's license became an impossible task for a person who spoke very little or no English.

The fact that there is no hard evidence of Puerto Ricans living in Rhode Island prior to the 1950s and 60s does not necessarily mean that there was no other Hispanic presence in the state before that time. Indeed there was. But as with the other Latino immigrants, it took a decade and a half for their presence to be noticed. Today, Puerto Ricans are indeed making strong headway into the empowerment of Latinos in Rhode Island. The first Latino elected official to the Providence City Council is Puerto Rican as is the first judge.

## 2. The Dominicans

As it has been with Cuba and Puerto Rico, the United States has always maintained a strong strategic geo-political and economic interest in the Dominican Republic. By the late 19th century, the US was involved in covert plans to annex the island, and, following a period in which it controlled the collection and application of Dominican customs revenue, it occupied the island from 1916 to 1924. At their departure, the military forces left in power General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, a dictator who would go on to rule the island for 30 years of the most brutal tyranny in the Caribbean.

In 1963, two years after the fall of Trujillo's regime, more than 10,000 Dominicans began to enter into the United States, where two years before this figure was a mere 3,045. By 1966, when the US was removing its forces from the island, more than 16,500 Dominicans were entering the US every year.<sup>22</sup>

There are several factors that caused Dominican immigration to the US during earlier waves. During the 1970s and 80s, the biggest reason for Dominican immigration was family reunification. Facilitated by the Family Reunification Act of the Immigration and Naturalization Act, many Dominicans came to the US under the sponsorship of spouses, parents or siblings. They were thus welcomed into the United States by an already-established Dominican community—one who facilitated their entrance into the economic and social aspects of American society.<sup>23</sup>

## Dominicans in Rhode Island

Although most literature today will chart the immigration patterns of Dominicans from the Dominican Republic to New York City, a sizable population of Dominicans can also be found to have made their home in New York since the passage of the Family Reunification Act of 1965. Their arrival to Rhode Island took place almost a decade later.

Beginning in the 1970s, and through the 1990s, Providence experienced a steady increase in its Hispanic population, mainly people looking for a way to get out of New York City. The migration of Dominicans and other Hispanics toward the New England states occurred for a variety of reasons. Like most immigrants, the Dominicans came to the United States looking for a better life. Their trip northward stemmed from the same reasoning. Since New York City is the first stop for many Dominicans, the overcrowding of the city and the heavy concentration of Latinos there were cited as a major factor in their decision to leave. Described by many Dominicans as beautiful due to its small-town infrastructures, some Dominicans moved to Providence to escape the urban atmosphere and the tight ethnic enclaves. Dominicans currently living in Providence say that Rhode Island offered a safe environment for families with children.<sup>24</sup>

Employment was another motivation for the migration from New York City to Providence. New factories started opening up in New England, and jobs became available to the Dominicans, mainly in jewelry and textile mills. During that time, it was said that jobs were so abundant that factory owners took to the streets to look for workers. And the Dominicans who found these jobs sent home word of the employment opportunities with money tucked inside their letters.<sup>25</sup>

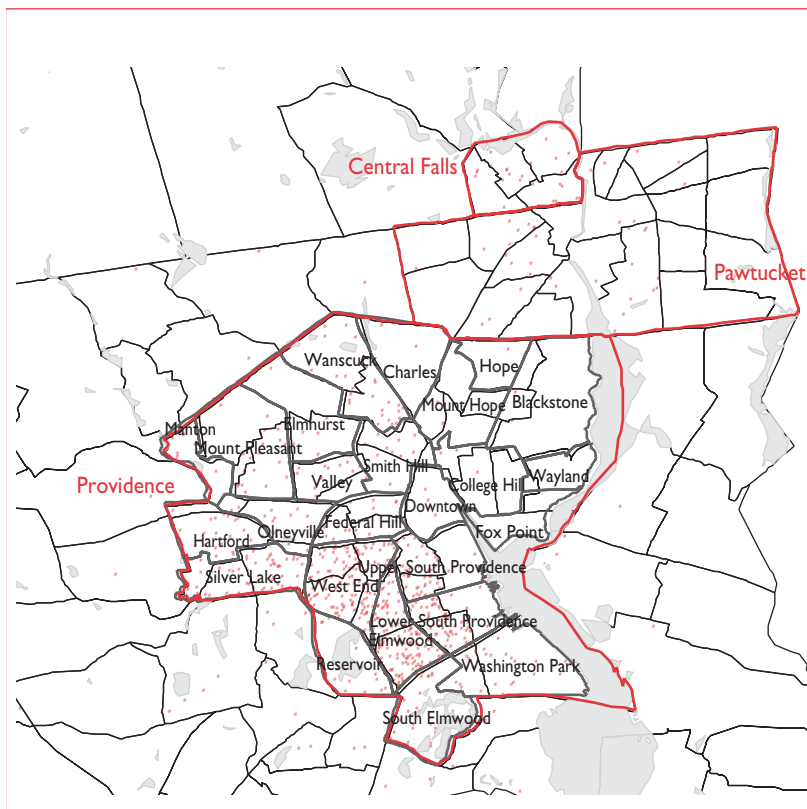
To many Dominicans, Providence was and still is the city of choice because this is where many of the first Hispanics settled, and continue to reside today. During the

late 1950s and 1960s, there were not many Hispanics in Providence, and certainly fewer in other parts of Rhode Island, to help them acclimate to their new home. Without family, many Hispanics relied on the help of a woman named Josefina Rosario, and her family.<sup>26</sup> Fondly known as “Doña Fefa,” many people visited Providence before moving here, staying with Doña Fefa. To many, she was their only friend and ally. For years, Fefa and her husband, Tony, cordoned off sections of their apartment located on Broad Street in the South Side of Providence, and housed the newcomers. They helped their guests find jobs in restaurants, jewelry factories, and textile mills. They went as far as to go with them to help them get driver’s licenses and Social Security cards, and even provided assistance with enrolling their children in the public schools.

The Rosarios were not only the first Dominican couple to arrive in Rhode Island from

## Map 2

Concentrations of Dominicans in the Greater Providence area.



Sources: Population counts: Census Bureau 2000a  
Geography Data: Census Bureau 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files  
(via Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com));  
Neighborhoods: The Providence Plan (unpublished correspondence)

New York City in 1952. They were also the first to open the first Hispanic food market and restaurant in the state called Fefa's Market. Today, the Dominican community is clearly the leader in Hispanic-owned businesses on Broad Street, Elmwood Avenue and Cranston Street in Providence. Providence is now a community waiting to be shaped by Hispanics, their experiences and their customs. A walk along Broad Street and other parts of the South Side of Providence today boasts the entrepreneurial endeavors of Dominicans in the form of *bodegas*, restaurants and beauty salons, among the many cultural symbols of success. Today's Dominicans also boast the highest political activity among Latinos in Rhode Island. They have helped elect the second Hispanic legislator in the history of Rhode Island to a local House seat, with the promise of electing at least two more individuals, perhaps including the first state Senator, in the next local elections.

### 3.The Colombians

Like most Hispanic immigrants, Colombians coming to the United States did not start to appear in significant numbers until recent decades. In 1960, fewer than 3,000 Colombians immigrated to the United States, but by 1965, that number had grown to 11,000. Another 65,000 came during the late-1960s, followed by the peak years of Colombian immigration in the 1970s when up to 78,000 made their way to the US. In the 1980s, this wave started to taper off and today a slow but steady stream of immigrants still moves from Colombia to the United States.<sup>27</sup>

While Colombian immigration today may be caused by the recent years of political turmoil and social unrest, the majority of Colombian immigrants came to the US before the so-called "drug wars." Colombians have a deeply-rooted perception about economic and political opportunities in the United States, which is found to be an important factor for immigration here, more so than war or unemployment back home. Colombians have immigrated to traditional Hispanic destinations such as New York City, Florida and New Jersey, but also to peripheral areas such as Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

#### Colombians in Rhode Island

In this study of the Colombian community of Rhode Island, the town of Central Falls plays a very important role, for it is here that active recruitment of labor by local factories was influential in bringing the large Colombian population to the state. Research on this community shows that this migration to Rhode Island by the Colombians began in 1966, and today a large percentage of that community continues to work in factories and textile mills in Central Falls.<sup>28</sup>

Central Falls is located north of the city of Providence. It is an area often recognized as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, where textiles and factories began to spring up in the 1700s. The first person to bring industry to the region was Samuel Slater, who in 1790 opened the first American cotton-spinning mill in nearby Pawtucket. It was because of Slater's innovative thinking that countless of future immigrants to this country found themselves quickly settling into life as mill workers in Northern Rhode Island.

Remarkably enough, almost all of the Colombians who live in Central Falls today come from one of two regions in Colombia: the Antioquia Province, in the central mountainous region, and Baranquilla, located on the Atlantic coast. Antioquia, of which the capital is Medellín, has historically been one of the most developed and industrialized areas of Colombia. As far back as the 1920s, textiles were the biggest manufacturing industry there, besides coffee processing.

The Colombian population in Rhode Island owes its beginnings to one gentleman who, in the early 1960s, had an insightful idea. Jay Guttiari was a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) when his father, who owned Lyons Fabric Company, a textile mill in Central Falls, told him that he was experiencing a labor shortage at his work site. The idea came to Guttiari while visiting his college roommate's family in Colombia. It was then that he saw first-hand the highly skilled work of the textile workers in Medellín. He called his father back in Rhode Island to share his excitement, and soon recruited four men to work in his father's mill in Central Falls. Because these men were already trained in the textile business, they proved to be excellent workers. Soon, the idea caught on and many other mills in Central Falls began to recruit Colombian workers; places like Pontiac and Cadillac Mills hired these workers who stopped the textile business in Rhode Island from fading away in the 1960s.<sup>29</sup>

By the mid-70s, the textile factories stopped recruiting Colombian labor. However, a steady flow of family and friends from Colombia continued to make their way to Rhode Island for the next ten years. Many Colombians began to come to Rhode Island from New York in search of a peaceful prosperous life. Employment opportunities here were good and the promise of a good education, the opportunity to start a business and reunification with family were many reasons for coming to Rhode Island. The promise of jobs were always available to the Colombians who came to Central Falls, and many of the mills employed generations of families because they proved to be hard-working and dedicated.

In the mid-1980s, however, all that changed when most of the mills and factories began to slow production and the owners were forced to lay off hundreds of workers as they prepared for the businesses to shut down for good. This posed an especially

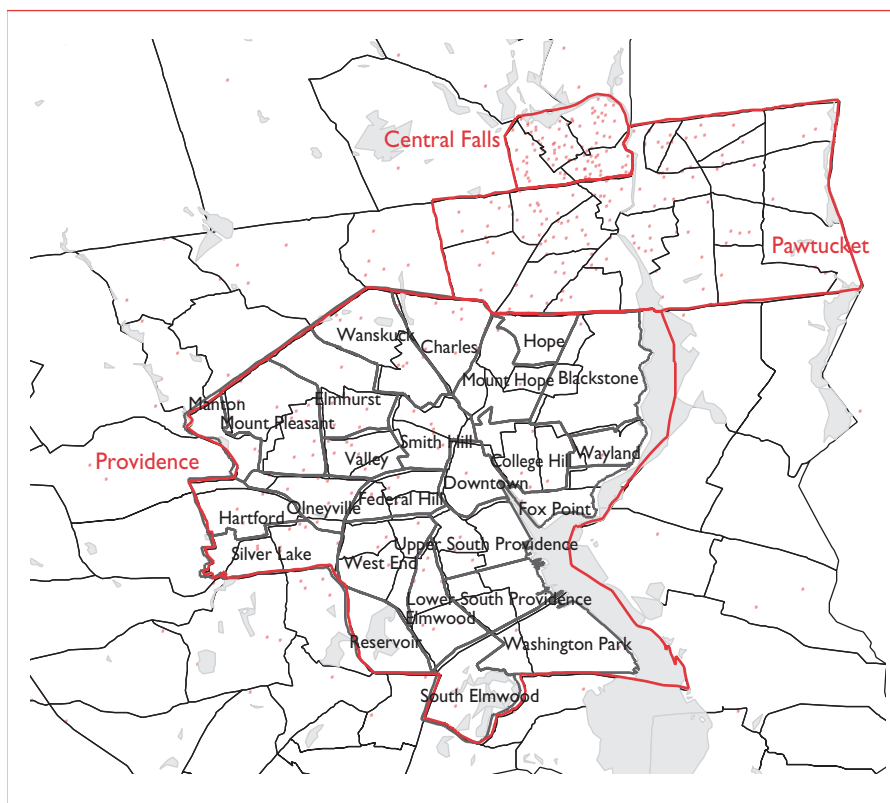


difficult problem for Colombians employed at these factories. Many workers began moving to South Carolina, where it was rumored that the textile mills there were looking for workers.<sup>30</sup> It was especially difficult for those who had come in the early years, because they did not feel like uprooting their families for a second time. Another issue they faced was the fact that despite having lived in America for almost 15 years before the factories began closing down, they still had not had the opportunity, or felt it necessary to learn English. One of the first men who came to work at Lyons was Bernardo Chamorro who said that he had spent so much time with other Colombians at work, at home, and socializing that he never felt the need to learn English. Anyone who walked through many of the mills on any given day could hear the buzzing of Spanish as the workers busied themselves with their daily tasks.<sup>31</sup>

### Map 3

#### Concentration in Greater Providence.

Note: This map represents the concentration of South Americans in the Providence area; Colombians account for 64% of all South Americans in Providence



Sources: Population counts: Census Bureau 2000a

Geography Data: Census Bureau 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (via Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com)); Neighborhoods: The Providence Plan (unpublished correspondence)

Many families did not, however, believe that their lives were over when the mills began to close down. Instead, they saw this as an opportunity to seek new skills, including the learning of the English language. The younger Colombians saw this as an opportunity to leave Central Falls, pursue higher education, and to seek better opportunities for themselves and their families.

In the 1980s and 90s, the Colombian community of Rhode Island continued to grow steadily, with Central Falls remaining as their destination whether it be directly from Colombia, or from places like Florida, where a number of Colombians who were living there felt it was time to be reunited with families in Rhode Island. Businesses grew to the point where one could walk down one of the main streets of Central Falls and find Spanish-language signs boasting Colombian-owned markets, restaurants, bakeries, record stores, beauty salons, and even a social service agency founded by Colombians. Cultural organizations such as the Colombian American Association were formed, and the local Catholic and Episcopal churches began holding religious services entirely in Spanish.

The development of the Colombian community in Central Falls has brought a large increase in their numbers. While the early Colombian settlers came to Central Falls to make a living, they did not plan to establish an enclave. Today, however, the Colombians are very much an established part of Central Falls, and the children and grandchildren of the first families in the city are in a better position to organize their community and to promote their culture while seeking a greater presence in the larger American society.

## 4. The Guatemalans

One cannot talk about the history of the Guatemalan community without mentioning the Guatemalan Mayans who have been trapped in the middle of a civil war since the 1950s. The civil war started when the United States helped overthrow the Socialist government of Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz's government was taking land away from the United Fruit Company, a US-owned export company, to distribute it to the poor peasants of Guatemala. The government, put into place with US support, was opposed by many local people. The new government death squads killed thousands of people for supporting the "guerrilla forces" or for refusing to support the local government. Because of the violence and economic problems caused by the civil war, approximately 250,000 people fled Guatemala in the 1980s in search of a more stable place to live.<sup>32</sup> For many, the United States was a place to gain economic security and safety. People fled their homes vowing to return after the civil war ended or after they gained financial security. Popular destinations were Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, and a popular destination for many Mayans has turned out to be Indiantown, Florida, a

community of industrial textile workers.<sup>33</sup>

Many refugees were taken in by the Catholic Church, which gave them sanctuary within its walls. The sanctuary movement was started at the border between Texas and Mexico in the 1980s in an effort to raise awareness about the political situation in Central America. It quickly spread northward and made its way to New England.

## Guatemalans in Rhode Island

For many Guatemalans, Rhode Island became a point on the way to political asylum in Canada, simply a temporary stop-over. In the 1980s and 90s, the Guatemalan community became more visible, settling in places like Providence, Central Falls and Woonsocket. Today, Guatemalans can also be found in large numbers in Aquidneck Island (primarily Portsmouth and Middletown) working in nurseries and running their own lawn care businesses.

When Guatemalans first began to settle in Rhode Island, one of the biggest attractions for them was that it was a peaceful place, especially compared to cities like New York and Los Angeles. Many of the first Guatemalans to reach Rhode Island were from small farming communities, and the rural feeling of Rhode Island—particularly Aquidneck Island—made them feel very much at home.

The first reported Guatemalans began to arrive in New England in the early to mid-1960s. Those were the years of the civil rights movement, and many women and African-Americans were moving out of jobs as domestic workers into better-paying ones. There was a need to fill these abandoned positions, and employment agencies in Boston reached out as far as Guatemala searching for domestic workers. By the late 1960s and early 70s, many of these women eventually found their way to Providence when city life in Boston became too overwhelming for them and their families. At that time, the Guatemalans who arrived in Rhode Island found very few Hispanics living here. The only services that were available to them were limited ones offered by the Catholic Church. Many Guatemalans felt isolated from their people as they sought places to speak their language or for the familiar foods that they needed to cook their native dishes. The only Hispanic business, where they found a bit of comfort was a place called Fefa's Market, a restaurant and market in South Providence (owned by Josefina Rosario) which sold many Dominican staples. Eventually Guatemalans looking for food that reminded them of home ended up at Roger Williams Park, where a Guatemalan family pulled up their truck once a week to sell tortillas.<sup>34</sup>

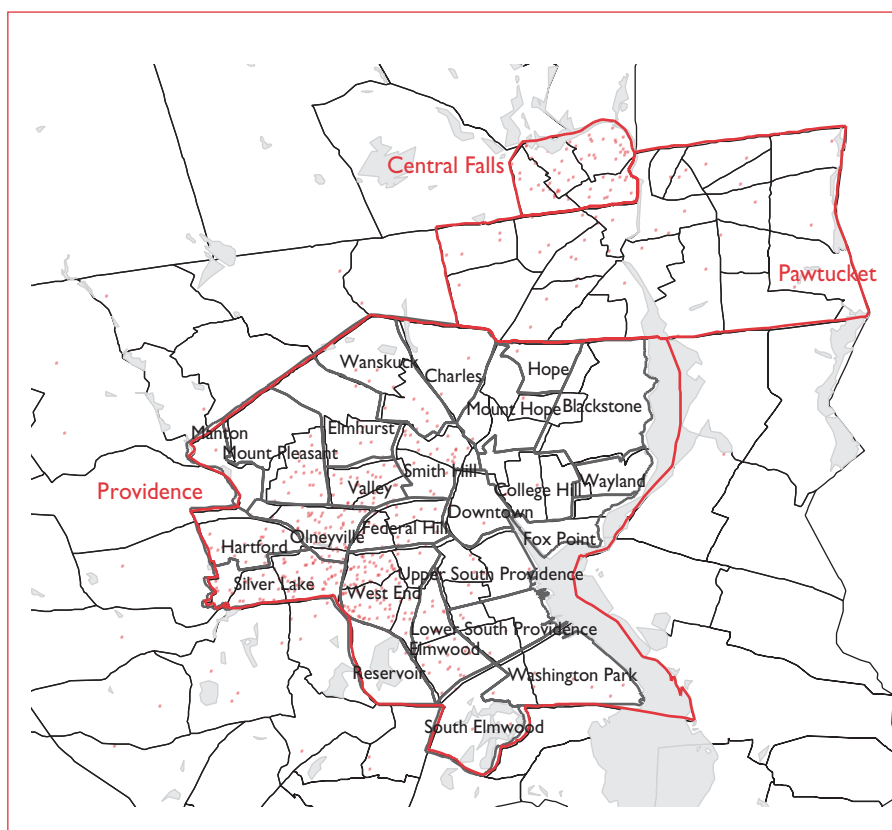
Feelings of isolation were often expressed by many Hispanics in Rhode Island, including one Guatemalan woman interviewed for this project, who considers herself and her

family to be one of the first to arrive in Rhode Island in 1962. Because of her undocumented status when she and her family reached Rhode Island, she remembers very little about her life in the West End of Providence, where she and her family lived in hiding in the home of a friend for almost two years. Even at the age of eight, she remembers living in fear that they would be found by authorities, and the loneliness sometimes led her to wish she could return to her country just so she could walk outside and breathe the fresh air of her familiar world. During her interview, she commented on the irony of hearing her parents talk about coming to America to find a more stable place to live, a place where they could gain economic security and safety, and to be free to walk the streets without fear of government oppression. At

#### Map 4

##### Concentration in Providence.

Note: Map shows concentration of Central Americans in Greater Providence. Guatemalans account for 80% of all Central Americans in Providence.



Sources: Population counts: Census Bureau 2000a  
 Geography Data: Census Bureau 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (via Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com)); Neighborhoods: The Providence Plan (unpublished correspondence)

that time, there were three such families from Guatemala who had been brought to Rhode Island through the Catholic Church, an entity that was not prepared to give them the appropriate services needed to become contributing citizens of the US.<sup>35</sup>

Formal records show that during the 1970s and 80s Guatemalans began to settle in high numbers in the West End neighborhood of Providence, and also in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence—on Westminster Street and in the vicinity of Saint Teresa's Catholic Church, where a Spanish mass held every Sunday made them feel at home. The areas around Broadway Street in Providence, just east of Olneyville, are also heavily populated with Guatemalans. There are also pockets of Guatemalans in northern Rhode Island, in places like Central Falls and Woonsocket. Remarkably, in North Providence, a small community has developed, one that includes Quiché-speaking Mayans, an interesting phenomenon that has raised a new set of social problems for this community.

According to one Guatemalan who has lived in Rhode Island since the 1960s, the Guatemalan community today is still very isolated.<sup>36</sup> Many individuals do not get involved in political advocacy or find it hard to access state social services for which they qualify primarily because they are accustomed to fearing anything public or government-sponsored. The Guatemalan community today lives quietly in Rhode Island, and still relies on some assistance from the Catholic Church and other social service agencies. A number of restaurant and markets that sell Guatemalan foods are now serving the large number of Guatemalans who live in Providence and Central Falls.

## 5. The Mexicans

Mexican immigration to the US between 1890 and 1965 has been called one of the most significant demographic phenomena in the history of the Americas. This Mexican migration took many forms and contributed greatly to the growth and development of the United States as a nation. Between 1920 and 1930, a large migration began to take place from the Southwest to industrial cities all across America. Mexicans began to find employment not only in steel factories in the Midwest, but also with companies such as the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and Bethlehem Steel in Pennsylvania.<sup>37</sup> Soon other jobs became available in meat-packing plants, utility companies, construction, trucking and eventually in agricultural trades such as sugar-beet fields in Michigan and tobacco, vegetable and fruit fields in New England.

### Mexicans Arrive in Rhode Island

There is little known about the Mexican community's presence in Rhode Island until the mid-1990s, although there is some evidence to suggest that there were small

pockets of them living in Rhode Island on-and-off as far back as the 1920s. This evidence was found in the following headline which appeared in a 1938 article in the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, Rhode Island's local newspaper: "Only 15 Mexicans in Rhode Island."<sup>38</sup> The story goes on to talk about the "brisk business with that country" that warranted the appointment of Edgar L. Burchell as Mexican consul in Rhode Island in 1924. Burchell set up an office at 42 Westminster Street in Providence, where he also served as "immigration officer, diplomat, tourist agent and tax collector." The article explains that a good part of the business of Burchell's office concerned ships clearing from the port of Providence for Mexico. Upon returning to Rhode Island, the ships would sometimes contain a handful of Mexican citizens on-board who had assisted with transportation of the ship's cargo. These individuals would be allowed to temporarily live in Rhode Island while the ship awaited its return to Mexico. In the meantime, they would find agricultural work, harvesting and picking crops in local farms. According to the newspaper article, this was the first Mexican consulate's office in Rhode Island. The article goes on to mention that Mr. Burchell was visited by only five "Mexican nationals" in 1937, all of whom came to his office seeking an interpreter or other personal and medical assistance.

Rhode Island had its share of agricultural farms, and with it came a need for the cheap labor and dedication that Mexicans and other immigrants were ready to provide. During the 1920s, around the time that Burchell was acting as Mexican consulate in Rhode Island, a small number of the Mexicans who had been onboard the cargo ships found their way to fields in Southern states such as West Virginia and North Carolina. They would return to Rhode Island when they received word that the ship was ready to leave port. Those who chose to stay in Rhode Island also became temporary field laborers, and were hired to pick fruits and vegetables on farms located in South Providence and in places like North and South Kingstown. Documentation of how and where these Mexicans actually lived in Rhode Island has yet to be uncovered. In fact, this community seems to have virtually disappeared from records until the 1980s and 90s, when they began appearing in farms in West Warwick and Coventry that were owned by the state. Further growth came in the mid-1990s when the US and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and reportedly Mexicans began to arrive in Rhode Island by the hundreds, this time to work in the jewelry industry in Providence.

The barriers faced by Mexicans in Rhode Island during their steady growth in the 1990s were primarily those of language and culture. The first group of Mexicans who worked for long hours in factory jobs did not often have the time to learn English or become acclimated to the American system. They were considered by social service providers and others working in the Hispanic community as an "invisible" community

during the early 1990s. Despite the language barriers, however, they did find the resources to begin opening their own businesses: a tortilla making factory, several restaurants and a bakery all located in the upper-Federal Hill and Olneyville sections of Providence. It was the opening of these businesses that began to bring more Mexicans out of their homes in western Rhode Island to Providence where they could purchase and eat the native foods of their country.

The first and largest Mexican association in New England was formed in Rhode Island in the mid-1990s, an organization which has established strong ties with the Mexican Consulate, now located in Boston. Perhaps the relationship between these two entities can be credited with the surprising growth of Mexican population in Rhode Island during the latter part of the 1990s.

It was the ability of these two groups to organize and offer several citizenship drives and educational workshops that led Mexicans from as far away as Bangor, Maine to make their way to Rhode Island to take advantage of these services not often found in other states. Having found a variety of work opportunities here, places where they could eat their local foods, and other fellow Mexican with whom they could socialize, many Mexicans who first came here temporarily are now calling Rhode Island their home. The 2000 Census ranked the Mexican population in Rhode Island a surprising fourth, thus placing this community just above the mill-working Colombians of Central Falls.

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# The Situation of Latinos in Rhode Island

**THIS CHAPTER FOCUSES ON** the current situation facing the Latino<sup>39</sup> community of Rhode Island. The first section addresses four issues that frame the Latino experience. It analyzes the youth of the Latino population of Rhode Island, which is found to be younger than any other Latino community in New England. This finding has great implications for services, particularly education. The second issue that cuts across the experience of Latinos in Rhode Island is the fact that most are newcomers to Rhode Island and to the United States. This theme, which was briefly explored in the first section of this report, “Latinos in Rhode Island: Growth and Demographic Concentration,” is analyzed further here highlighting key characteristics of the newcomers. The discussion on the third cross-cutting issue focuses on the fact that Latinos in Rhode Island have higher levels of poverty than their counterparts in New England and nationally. This report explores in as much detail as available data allow the characteristics of Latinos in poverty. Finally, this report explores what most Latino leaders interviewed for this study expressed were the greatest strengths of the Rhode Island Latino community: its organizations, its leaders, and its political activism.

Having painted in broad strokes the situation of Latinos in the state, the report then focuses on specifics: jobs and education, health and human services, housing and business development, and the cultural activity of Latinos in Rhode Island. It focuses on these issues by first answering the question, What is known about the situation of Latinos? in relationship to each issue. We will tell the stories as we understand them

based on Census data; existing information from both state administrative and other sources; interviews with providers in each area; interviews with Latino leaders; and focus group discussions with members of the Latino community. What is the situation with Latinos and jobs? What are the outcomes in education? What is the health status of Latinos? What are some issues affecting the development of Latino businesses? What is the situation of Latinos in the areas of housing and human services? are some of the questions that will be addressed. At the conclusion of each exploration we will report on the perspective of providers, leaders and community members on the Latino community's needs in each of these areas.

Data for the report come from the following sources:

**2000 US Census:** The currently available data from the 2000 US Census provided basic and comparative population characteristics such as age, race, etc. The interpretation of Census information must take into account the distortion introduced by the undercount of sub-populations, which is generally more severe for persons of color, immigrants and the poor. In 1990, the undercount in Rhode Island was estimated at 0.1% overall and 5.4% for Latinos, compared with the national figures of 1.6% and 5.0%,<sup>40</sup> meaning that the undercount in Rhode Island for the general population was less than that observed nationally, while the opposite was true for Latinos. The undercount estimates for Census 2000 are not yet released, but given response-rate trends, should be better than previous Censuses. However, for a variety of reasons it should be expected that Latinos are still more likely to be missed than the population as a whole. Be that as it may, Census information provides a reasonably good reflection of true population conditions.

**Current Population Survey:** Bureau of Labor Statistics data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) was used to generate both individual and household data for Rhode Island. Two three-year, combined samples (1999, 2000, and 2001), one of all households and one of all persons in households located in Rhode Island, were constructed to estimate population and household characteristics.<sup>41</sup> The estimates should approximate the conditions in March 2000 and the income earned in 1999. From the analysis of the CPS data we have drawn detailed descriptions of income, poverty, employment, an educational attainment of Rhode Island Latinos. Because it is drawn from population estimates developed prior through that decennial Census, data from the CPS may not be as accurate then that from the Census,<sup>42</sup> and are not appropriate for statistical tests. However, we believe the CPS data for our useful estimates of conditions actually experienced by the population.

**Federal, State, and Private Sources.** Existing data from federal, state and private sources were another source of information. In most cases, we utilized data already published

in reports and/or on the Internet. In general, the availability of state administrative data broken down by race is very sparse; the only analysis we readily found on the experience of the Latino population of the state were the descriptions of Latino health status and Latino cultural issues offered on the website of the Office of Minority Health of the Department of Health.<sup>43</sup> In some cases, the data are not collected in a way that makes the identification reliable. For example, in the Family Independence Program of the Department of Human Services, it is up to the participant to check off the race/ethnicity box, and therefore there is no consistent collection of this information.<sup>44</sup> In cases where the data are collected, race and ethnicity is collected as a variable used to describe the characteristics of large samples or populations; although our search was limited, we found no cases in which analyses of that data were carried out to assess the situation of specific groups. In some cases, we requested special runs of data in order to describe the characteristics of the Latino sample, and in most cases received it. Data were easily available from the Rhode Island Department of Health and from the Department of Education. But, for example, the State Equal Opportunity Office does not keep tabs on the number of state workers of specific racial/ethnic groups (Blacks, Latinos and Asians, for example), although they do keep track of the number of “minorities,” women, and the disabled in the state workforce.

**Focus Groups:** In collaboration with CHisPA (the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy in Providence), four focus groups of ten persons each were conducted with Latino residents. The focus groups addressed the immigrant experience as well as the experience of Latinos in accessing services of different types.<sup>45</sup>

**In-depth Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with ten Latino leaders and 28 providers of services.<sup>46</sup> The selection of the leaders was initiated with a list constructed in discussion with staff of the Rhode Island Foundation and the director of CHisPA. This list was then augmented by lists of names provided by key informants from the Latino community. The final selection of the Latino leaders to be interviewed sought to produce a sample that was balanced in terms of national origin, age, and geographic representation. All ten Latino leaders who were asked to participate acceded to the interviews. The selection of the providers followed a similar pattern. Departing from an initial list, names of providers in the areas of education, health, human services, housing, economic development, and culture were sought from key informants. Five providers were selected to inform about each area. A combination of Latino and non-Latino providers was sought. Five providers declined to be interviewed.

## I. Four Cross-Cutting Issues:

### Youth, Effects of Immigration, Poverty and Organizational Environment

This section begins with the exploration of four facts that provide both context and perspective for the understanding of the experience of Latinos in Rhode Island. The first is that Latinos in Rhode Island are a young population, younger than Latinos nationally as well as other Latino communities in the region. The second fact is that a large majority of Latinos are new to the United States and to Rhode Island. Since the majority of native-born Latinos in Rhode Island are children, we can assume that the primary experience is that of the immigrant and migrant: of newcomers making an adaptation to the area. The third fact is that a large percentage of Latinos in Rhode Island are poor, a larger percentage than Latinos nationally, and that the majority of Latino children live in a poor household. Finally, the Latino organizational environment in Rhode Island is characterized by myriad informal volunteer organizations and a strong thrust towards political activism. These are issues that cut across and strongly shape the Latino experience in education and jobs, housing, and health and human services in Rhode Island.

## Latinos Are a Young Population

“Our biggest asset,” expressed a Latino leader “is that ours is a young community.”<sup>47</sup> On this, he is completely correct; Latinos are the youngest racial/ethnic group in Rhode Island. They are just a bit younger than Blacks, who are also a young population with a median age of 26.8 years, and significantly younger than whites, whose median age is 39.4 years. Providence shows the youngest median age for Latinos at 23.1 years. Rhode Island Latinos are also the youngest compared with other Latino communities nationally and regionally. With a median age of 23.6 years, Latinos have a lower median age than Latinos nationally and the lowest median age of any group of Latinos in the six New England states.<sup>48</sup> The youthfulness of the Latino community is even more salient in Rhode Island than nationally because the overall population of Rhode Island is somewhat older than that of the United States. Less than ten years separate the median age of Latinos nationally from that of the overall US population; the difference in median age between the Latino and overall population of Rhode Island is 14 years.

In this regard, the difference in the age structure between sectors of the population of Rhode Island is also remarkable. The age structure of the white population is distributed among three generational cohorts, the largest of which is represented by adults

age 30 to 59. The age structure of the Latino community, on the other hand, resembles a pyramid where the largest numbers correspond to children 19 years and under, tapering off to very few elderly. Sixty percent of the Latino population is under 30 years old, 43% are under 19. These dramatic differences in key demographic variables between the majority group and a minority population may result in differences in priorities in service delivery. In this case, for example, the provision of services for children is an overwhelming priority for the Latino community, while the majority population has needs that are more balanced among the different age groups.

The age structure of the Latino population also points to the strong, almost exclusive, presence of young families with children in this community. “Families are moving here together,” expressed a Latino leader. “We have less single individuals and more couples with children.” This situation creates great urgency about the needs of children, partic-

**Table I**

**Median Age of Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups – Rhode Island and selected cities, 2000. (years)**

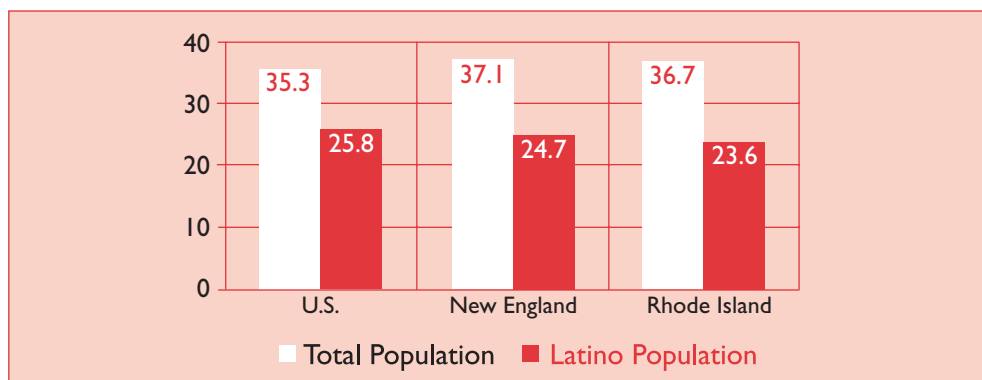
Note (a): includes Latinos that identified themselves as Black or as white. According to the US Bureau of the Census (2000a) 36% of Latinos identified as white and 5.5% identified as Black. Data that disaggregated Latinos from the other groups were not available at this time.

	<b>White<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Black<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Latino</b>
Rhode Island	39.4	26.8	23.6
Providence	34.6	25.2	23.1
Pawtucket	39.8	25.9	25.2
Central Falls	40.3	24.9	25.8

Source: US Bureau of the Census 2000(a)

**Figure I**

**Median Age Latino Population – US, New England and Rhode Island, 2000. (years)**



Source: US Bureau of the Census 2000 (a)

ularly, education. In our interviews with Latino leaders, we asked them to speak to us about the greatest challenges facing the community; most of them spoke to us about education. “It is very easy to speak about education in Rhode Island,” expressed one, “because we all have children, this is a community with a perspective focused on the future...”

But the young adults heading these young families appear to have few supports from their own parents and older relatives, as the swift reduction in the numbers of the older cohorts demonstrates. The Latino culture normally makes extensive social use of extended families and kin networks to support the rearing of children and the care of the elderly. In this young community, these networks of support appear to have been left behind. Recreating in a new context some of the elements of these systems of social support will be important for these young parents.

## A Closer Look at Latino Children

Latino children account for 13.8% of the population under 19 of Rhode Island, 40.3% of that of Providence, and more than half of Central Falls (see Figure 3). The largest number of Latino children live in Providence but it is in Central Falls where they account for the largest percentage of children under 19. In this city, one out of every two school-age children is Latino.

More than 54% of the Latino children in Rhode Island are under ten years old. Of all age groups, the largest cohort in the state and in Providence and Pawtucket is age five to nine, a group that is just starting its school career. In Central Falls, the largest cohort is even younger, under five years old. The greatest presence of Latino children

**Table 2**

Age distribution of the Latino population – Rhode Island and selected cities, 2000.

	Rhode Island		Providence		Pawtucket		Central Falls	
	# of Persons	Percent	# of Persons	Percent	# of Persons	Percent	# of Persons	Percent
Under 10 years	21,165	23.2	12,278	23.5	2,312	22.8	1,842	20.4
10–19 years	17,720	19.5	10,390	19.9	1,864	18.4	1,624	18.0
20–29 years	17,167	18.9	10,036	19.2	1,760	17.4	1,821	20.1
30–39 years	15,522	17.1	8,552	16.4	1,882	18.6	1,758	19.4
40–49 years	9,819	10.8	5,500	10.5	1,278	12.6	1,002	11.1
50–59 years	5,014	5.5	2,921	5.6	555	5.5	511	5.7
60–69 years	2,542	2.8	1,467	2.8	294	2.9	284	3.1
70 and over	1,871	2.1	1,002	2.9	196	1.9	199	2.1
Total	90,820	—	52,146	—	10,141	—	9,041	—

in Rhode Island schools is in the first three grades, and in some cases, it is yet to come. This indicates that the community's concern about education is well-placed.

Within the Latino community itself there are differences among the national origin groups (see Figure 4). Children under 19 make up the largest share of the Dominican population; more than half are under 19. They are the youngest population followed by Puerto Ricans, among whom 42.8% are children under 19. These two groups account for the majority of Latino children in Rhode Island.

The CPS also permits the comparison among US-born Latinos, Puerto Rican migrants, and Latin American immigrants of this age group.<sup>49</sup> The first section of this report, "Latinos in Rhode Island: Growth and Geographic Concentration," documented that US-born Latinos account for about 43% of the Latino population of Rhode Island; of these, children 19 years and under account for a full 67.2%. Among the Puerto Rican migrants, who account for 16% of the Rhode Island Latino population, about one-third

### Figures 2 and 3

Comparison of age structure of the Non-Hispanic white and Latino populations – Rhode Island, 2000.



Source for both figures: US Bureau of the Census, 2000a.



are 19 years old or younger. Latin American immigrants, who account for 41% of the Latino population, have the lowest percentage of children with 15% of their population 19 and under.

Most Latin American immigrants and Puerto Rican migrants are young adults who have come to the US and have had their children here. The US-born Latino population of Rhode Island is, in large measure, made up of children. They may be the children

**Table 3**

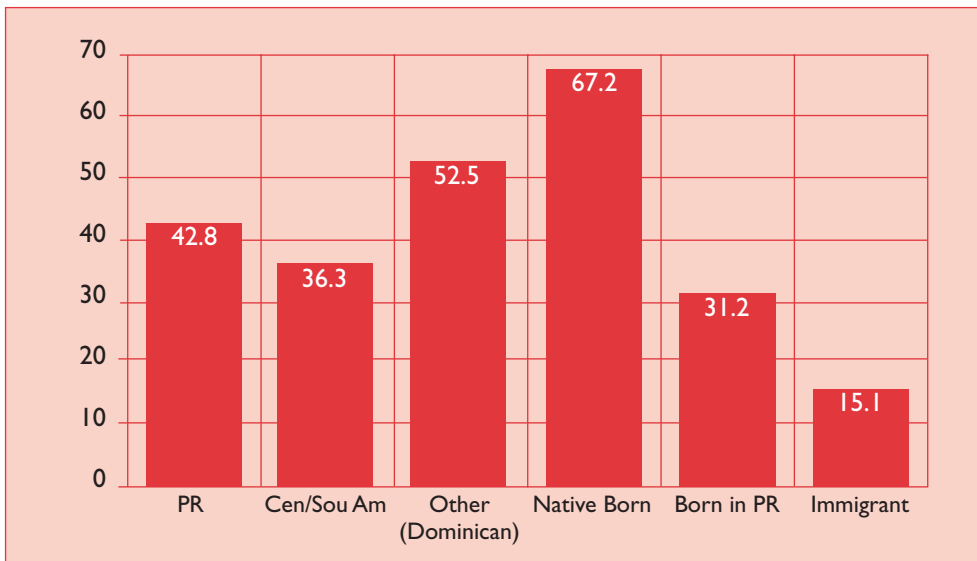
Latino children 19 years and under in selected cities – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)

	Rhode Island	Providence	Pawtucket	Central Falls
Total of Latino children 19 years and under	38,885	22,688	4,176	3,466
Percent of total child population	13.8	40.3	20.9	56.5
Under 5 years old	26.8	26.6	26.7	26.8
5 to 9	27.6	27.5	28.7	26.4
10 to 14	23.3	23.3	23.7	23.7
15 to 19	22.3	22.6	21.0	23.1

Source: US Bureau of the Census. 2000(a)

**Figure 4**

Percent of Latino population from different national groups and with different immigration status who are 19 years of age and under – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)



Source: Bureau of the Census 2001(a) and 2000(b)

of parents of Latino background born in the US but, more likely, they are the US-born children of immigrant and migrant parents. Making more precise the immigration status of these children, we find that 84.7% of Latino children under 19 in Rhode Island are US citizens by birth—born either in the US or in Puerto Rico.<sup>50</sup>

## 2. Most Latinos in Rhode Island Are Newcomers

The first and second sections of this report, “Latinos in Rhode Island: Growth and Geographic Concentration” and “Rhode Island Latinos”<sup>51</sup> document the varied make-up of the Latino community of the state. The newcomers come to Rhode Island from Puerto Rico and as immigrants from myriad countries in Latin America, the most numerous being from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Colombia and Mexico. Information from the CPS pooled sample suggests that although a large sector of the community is made up of persons born in the US, the majority of the Latino population (57%) is made up of immigrants from Latin America and persons who have come to the US mainland from Puerto Rico.<sup>52</sup> Figure 5 shows the time of arrival of cohorts of Latino groups.

In addition to the aggregate of all Latinos, the groups represented are Puerto Ricans,

**Table 4**

**National groups, Latino population – Rhode Island, 2000.**

Note: (a) These include persons that identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, or as Spanish or Spaniards.

Group	Population	% of Latino Population
All Latino or Hispanics	90,820	—
Puerto Rican	25,422	27.99
Dominican	17,894	19.70
Guatemalan	8,949	9.85
Colombian	5,881	6.48
Mexican	5,706	6.28
Other South American	1,455	1.60
Salvadoran	1,206	1.33
Other Central American	1,165	1.28
Cuban	1,128	1.24
Bolivian	961	1.06
Ecuadorian	544	0.6
Other Hispanic or Latino <sup>a</sup>	20,509	22.58

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000(a).

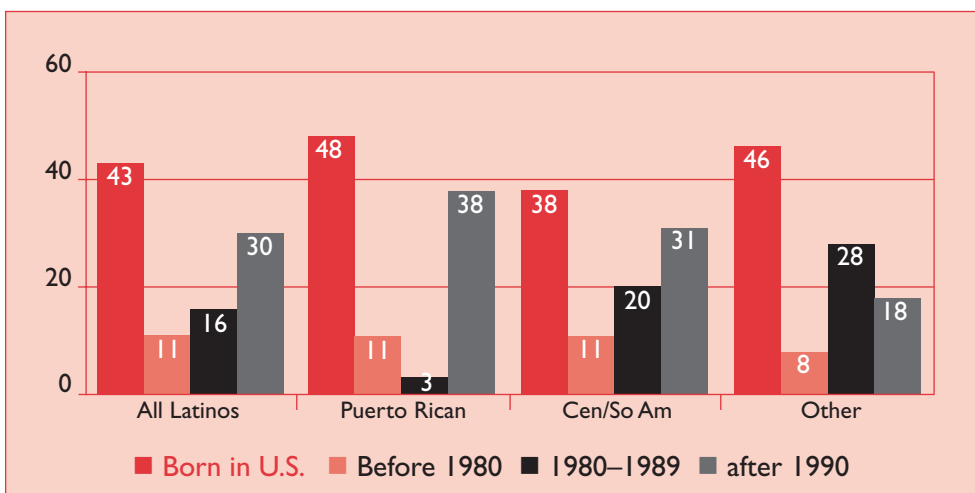
Central and South Americans<sup>53</sup> and “others,” the latter reflecting largely the Dominican population.<sup>54</sup> The cohorts represent those that arrived before 1980, between 1980 and 1989 and 1990 and later. The table also presents the percentage of persons of each group that have been born in the United States.

Across all groups, the largest percentage is accounted for by immigrants; across all national groups, more than half are newcomers to the United States. Among Puerto Ricans as well as among Central and South Americans, the largest group is made up of those persons that have arrived in the mainland United States since 1990, denoting a large number of very recent newcomers in those communities. Among all groups, we also find a relatively similar percentage of immigrants that have been in the United States for a much longer period of time. These “experienced immigrants” are an important resource in this overwhelmingly newcomer community, according to leaders, providers and focus group members interviewed for this study.

Considering the large percentage of recently arrived immigrants and that most US-born Latinos in Rhode Island are children, most likely children of first-generation immigrants, it is safe to say that the primary experience of Latinos in Rhode Island is of a newcomer. Their entry into Rhode Island reflects all the settlement and identity issues that characterize the Latino diasporas in the late 20th century:<sup>55</sup> an economic incorporation marked by the decline of “good” industrial jobs, learning to navigate a bi-cultural world, creating one Latino group out of myriad national groups, and learning the significance of race and ethnicity, of being a person of color regardless

**Figure 5**

Time of arrival in the mainland US of Latino groups – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

of the color of their skin, in American society.

Both interview and focus group accounts underscore that Latinos came to Rhode Island both directly from their country of origin and from other cities in the US. The direct migration from their country of origin is most common among Central and South Americans, while Puerto Ricans and Dominicans usually arrive in Rhode Island after spending time in New York, Hartford or Boston. Most come legally, after going through the regular immigration process, but many others arrive undocumented, meaning that they crossed the border illegally or that they overstayed a legal visit. They come to the US seeking economic and social advancement. But they choose Rhode Island because of its safety and tranquility in comparison with other US cities where they had lived. “I came from Hartford and it was like living in New York, a lot of fights, a lot of deaths,” says a Puerto Rican man now living in Providence who participated in one of the focus groups, “I came here and saw that the environment was calmer. I have children and here my children are fine, it has gone well for me raising them here.”<sup>56</sup> This was a common story.

As is the case in most Latino communities across the United States, except for the earliest pioneers, new Latino immigrants have arrived in Rhode Island pulled by the core of immigrants already settled there. Interviewees and focus-group members expressed that, in some cases, their families had been in the area for a long time and were well-established; their presence buffered the early experience of immigrants and migrants as family members offered them their homes, assisted them in finding work, and helped them to navigate the entrance into their new city. But, in many other cases, their families were newcomers, just as they were. In those cases the process of entry was harsher: finding housing was a great problem, it took more time to find work, it was extraordinarily difficult to find their way to services.

The sample information shows that across all groups, there is a core of long-standing immigrant residents who have lived in the state since before 1980, but that among the newcomers, most had arrived after 1990. Among Puerto Ricans and Central and South Americans, about one of every three persons has been in the US only since 1990.

Latinos come to Rhode Island to work, and for many years they have done so in manufacturing and, more recently, in the service sector. But in the last decades, many of the manufacturing jobs have disappeared in Rhode Island and now many Latino immigrants work in low-wage jobs in the service industry. These are jobs that are also on short supply, according to Mario Bueno, of Progreso Latino’s United Community Workers. Many others work for “temp” agencies that pick up workers daily and deliver them to worksites across the state. Many of those jobs are seasonal and often do not have health benefits, sick days, or vacation. Finding work, keeping work, and being

able to live from the proceeds of their work, is a major challenge for immigrants today as it was in the past. Still, in comparison to the situation they faced in their country of origin, the situation in Rhode Island may look advantageous. A young Mexican man that participated in one of the focus groups put it this way:

“I miss my family; my mother told me to return. ‘Come back,’ she said. But I can’t. There are so many that would want an opportunity like the one I have. So many immigrants have died trying to reach here, I can’t waste this opportunity... I told my mother that I was going to work more, earn more money so that I can be somebody in the future...”<sup>57</sup>

As is true of many immigrants, Latinos come with great hope and enthusiasm to Rhode Island, ready to immerse themselves in a new life. Yet, navigating social entry into Rhode Island has proven a challenge. There are the expected barriers that a different language and culture place on the new immigrants as well as the many needs that arise from immigrant families that are dislocated and have few sources of support. Most families are wary of entering the system whether in education, health, human services, or cultural institutions. This is the case for several reasons: (1) a lack of familiarity with the services since they may not have been available in the same way in their country of origin; (2) a lack of knowledge of the existence and availability of the services; and (3) unawareness of being entitled to these benefits. This is particularly the case among undocumented immigrants. The evidence points to the fact that the Latino community of Rhode Island is largely absent from most of the state’s government and social institutions.<sup>58</sup>

## Latino Diversity

The binding force of a common language and, perhaps more importantly, a common historical experience as Latin Americans provides strong bonds for Latinos, regardless of where they come from. But the different immigrant status, shorter and longer tenure in the US, and the cultural and racial characteristics of the individual groups represent both strengths and challenges to the community.

Among Latinos, only Puerto Ricans do not have to concern themselves with immigration issues; they are citizens of the United States whether they were born on the island or on the mainland. Among Central Americans and Dominicans, on the other hand, immigration and legal documentation are primary concerns.

Immigration policies and the resulting immigration status for different Latino groups have been reflected in very different treatment of these groups. Early Cuban refugees received extensive federal support for their adaptation and incorporation into the

mainstream; Puerto Rican newcomers receive what they were entitled to as citizens but nothing specific to ease their entry to the mainland; Central Americans and Dominicans receive no support for the adaptation to their new home. These different experiences—completely out of the control of the immigrants themselves—have lasting implications for the future incorporation of the different Latino groups into American society, as well as for relations within the Latino community itself.

Another source of difference among Latino national groups is the variety of cultures and races they represent. The Caribbean groups—Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans—represent a racial and cultural mixture based on Mediterranean (Spanish), African, and, to a lesser extent, native American backgrounds. The blending of Spanish and African cultures is a particularly important characteristic of the Caribbean groups and is reflected in their cultural and artistic expression, their religious practices, their food, and even their language. Among South Americans, the African influence is much less pronounced, and the primary cultural blend can be traced back to European and native American cultures. This too is reflected in all aspects of their cultural expression. Central Americans, although primarily a mixture of native and European peoples, also have an African influence, particularly Latinos from areas bordering the Caribbean basin. Latinos can exhibit physical characteristics of all races or an extraordinarily diverse mixture of all of them.

The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are labels that hide a tremendous diversity of culture, race, as well as national and immigration experience. “We put ourselves under this neat umbrella,” says a Latino leader, “but we are so diverse. In a good sense, we have different cultures, we come with different levels of education, and we are here for very different reasons.”<sup>59</sup> Yet, the relationship that has been built among the groups is one of the community’s greatest accomplishments:

I have seen in the last 16 years a coming together of Colombians, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Guatemalans. We have a very diverse Latino community here that does not seem to have the same degree of animosity that other cities have shown to each other. It’s hard to find a meeting, it’s hard to find a demonstration, (and) it’s hard to find a gathering of Latinos that involves only one particular group.<sup>60</sup>

## A Closer Look at the Situation of Undocumented Immigrants

Whatever is said about the hardship experienced by immigrants, it pales when compared to the problems undocumented immigrants face. Most undocumented immigrants cross illegally through the Canadian and Mexican borders; cross by sea from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico and from there travel to the mainland US;

or overstay a legal visit to the United States. “Most undocumented immigrants fall into categories that take up to 12 years to become legal,” says Carl Krueger, an immigration lawyer working with Latino immigrants at the International Institute in Providence, “Older and unskilled workers have a difficult time obtaining a work visa and just because their child is born in the US, does not make them legal. Immigrants must be petitioned by someone who is a citizen or a legal resident in order to obtain legal residence.”<sup>61</sup> There is no certain information about the numbers of undocumented immigrants in Rhode Island but estimate place the undocumented population at 30,000 to 40,000.<sup>62</sup> Many of these undocumented immigrants are Latinos, but there are also undocumented persons from many other racial/ethnic groups.

What is clear is that the lives of the undocumented persons are largely defined by the absence of legal immigration papers. The “green card” is necessary for everything for which we require a social security number (for example, to get work, to obtain credit, for state tuition and college financial aid, and until recently, a drivers’ license). The absence of legal status and this basic identification places the undocumented person in a position where he/she is forced to accept very marginal work, with conditions that are usually unacceptable to legal immigrant or native workers and which, in some cases, violates rights generally guaranteed American workers. These are often jobs with salaries below the minimum wage, without benefits, and that often does not meet standards of occupational health and safety. “Those without papers are taken advantage of,” a young Dominican woman expressed in a focus group. “They pay you \$40 for a day of work, take it or leave it; some agencies pay as low as \$4 an hour and if you don’t take it, there have been times that employers report you to the immigration.” Or, said another focus-group participant, “You work for several weeks and the boss does not pay you and you are afraid to ask about your pay and keep on working.”

Undocumented workers are not eligible for Workmen’s Compensation or Social Security. They are also not eligible for Foods Stamps, FIP, Medicaid or “free care” in hospitals. The state of Rhode Island has guaranteed health insurance coverage for undocumented pregnant women and children, but not for any other adult. For the undocumented, all health care is fee for service, often obtained from private physicians. But most likely, no health care is sought unless it is an emergency. The undocumented also do not qualify for public or Section 8 housing and can seldom qualify for credit to purchase a home. The great majority are tenants and they are often abused by landlords, who know that they cannot lodge legal complaints against them.

**Table 5**

Special issues faced by undocumented Latino immigrants in Rhode Island.

<b>Education</b>	<p>Children are eligible for public school.</p> <p>Parents often don't feel safe going to schools, talking to teachers, raising questions or making complaints because of fear of discovery.</p> <p>Must pay "out-of-state" tuition in public colleges and universities; no financial aid available for higher education even for academically gifted students.</p>
<b>Experience at work</b>	<p>Violation of their rights as workers.</p> <p>Salaries below minimum wage</p> <p>Non payment of wages/overtime</p> <p>Jobs in which they are work offer no health insurance benefits or pensions.</p> <p>Not eligible for unemployment benefits.</p> <p>Not eligible for Workmen's compensation; often exposed to dangerous working conditions because employers know they will not complain for fear of discovery.</p> <p>Not eligible for social security.</p> <p>Do not meet licensing requirements for such work as teaching, nursing, etc.</p>
<b>Health care and human services</b>	<p>Generally shy away from seeking services because of fear of discovery, although they may be eligible for them</p> <p>Not eligible for welfare or for food stamps</p> <p>Lack of health insurance is great barrier to access to health services.</p> <p>Not eligible for Medicaid</p> <p>RiteCare (state sponsored medical insurance) offered to children and pregnant women. No coverage for adult male or non-pregnant female adults.</p> <p>Do not qualify for "free care" in hospitals.</p> <p>Most go to private physicians for health care and pay cash.</p>
<b>Housing</b>	<p>Often abused by landlords that know they cannot lodge legal complaints</p> <p>Often have to live in marginal and dangerous areas; afraid to leave their apartments.</p> <p>Very difficult to buy property without legal status; undocumented are also often afraid to buy housing</p> <p>Do not qualify for public housing or Section 8 housing, regardless of income.</p>



Finally, undocumented students have the right to attend school, but cannot obtain financial aid to go to college. A staff member of the Providence Public Schools reports that “some of the highest awards in high schools are for Latino undocumented students. They are high achievers yet, they do not qualify for federal financial aid.” He explains that the policy among higher education institutions has been to reject the undocumented or to treat them as “out-of-state” students and require them to pay higher “out-of-state” tuition. Immigration lawyers report that they frequently receive requests from school counselors seeking help for students in these situations, but there is nothing that can be done.

But perhaps most compelling is the fear of discovery that is part of the daily experience of the undocumented. The fear that officials will find out about their status keeps them away from health and human services, from the schools their children attend and even from community organizations. It keeps them away from complaining about violations of housing law and workers’ rights or about problems their children experience in school. “The undocumented community lives in panic,” say focus-group participants, “They are afraid to go and renew their drivers’ license, they are afraid to go to community services because they think that they are tied to immigration; people don’t have information—and often have the wrong information and that just creates more panic.” All this creates great emotional stress for families and affects their ability to cope emotionally and spiritually with the challenge of adaptation.

### 3. There is a High Rate of Poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island

An important finding of this report is that poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island is wide-spread and growing. Poverty among Latinos in the United States has historically been significantly higher than that of the overall population. Since the late 1960s, poverty among Latinos has been about three times that of the white population and comparable but slightly lower than that of Blacks.<sup>63</sup> The relative position of whites,

**Table 5 (continued)**

<b>Other issues</b>	<p>Immigration:</p> <p>Subject to fraud by lawyers and other intermediaries in dealing with immigration issues</p> <p>Cannot travel to their countries of origin.</p> <p>Afraid to participate in community organizations because of fear of discovery</p>
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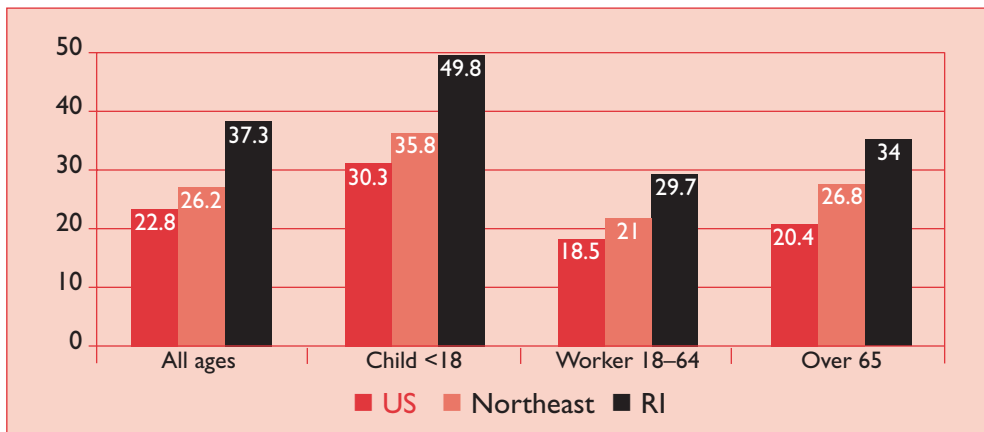
Blacks and Latinos with regard to poverty has largely remained the same to this day, in spite of the growth and expansion of the recent economy. In 2000, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a total poverty rate of 11.8% for the nation's overall population. The rate of poverty among whites was 9.8%, that of Latinos was 22.8, and that of Blacks was 23.6%.<sup>64</sup>

Rhode Island Latinos of all ages, but particularly Latino children, show rates of poverty that are well above those of Latinos nationally and in the Northeast. Comparing the percentages of the Latinos of all ages, Latino children under 18, Latino workers, and Latino elderly that live below the federal poverty rate nationally, in the Northeast, and in Rhode Island, the Rhode Island rates are higher than those found elsewhere (see Figure 7).<sup>65</sup>

Earlier reports from Rhode Island Kids Count had already shed light on the over-

**Figure 7**

Latino population below the poverty rate – US, Northeast, and Rhode Island, 2000 .(%)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000; US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

**Table 5**

Poverty in households with children under 18 years by race – Rhode Island, 2001. (%)

	White	Black	Asian/ Pac Is	Latino	Total
Less than poverty	7	22	26	41	12
100–125 %	1	—	14	9	3
125–150%	3	3	6	4	3
Above 150%	88	71	54	47	82

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000b and 2001a

representation of Latino children among children living in poor households. Latino children account for 14% of all children in the state and 29.6% of children living in poverty in Rhode Island.<sup>66</sup> Information from the Current Population Survey shows that 41% of Latino households with children under 18 live below the federal poverty rate, which is 3.5 times that of the overall population of Rhode Island and six times that of whites (see Table 5). Latinos have the highest percentage of poor households with children of all groups in the state.

In general, Latino household incomes in Rhode Island are lower than Latino household incomes nationally and regionally. Median household income for Latinos in Rhode Island is 75% of the median income of Latinos nationally and slightly less than other Latinos in the region. Median incomes for Latinos are 49% of the median income of whites in Rhode Island and slightly more than those of Blacks (see Table 6).

During the 1990s, increases in employment led to increases in income and slight decreases in poverty rates both nationally and regionally, but there is evidence that this economic prosperity has not improved the situation of all persons, particularly those at the very bottom. This seems to be the case for Latinos in Rhode Island, especially for Latino children. Among the overall Latino population, Latino children under 19 and Latino workers the rates of poverty declined for Latinos nationally during the 1990s but increased in Rhode Island during the same period. By comparison, poverty rates among Latinos in Massachusetts declined significantly during the 1990s from a rate of 43.8% in 1993 to 1995 to a rate of 34.6% in 1997 to 1999.<sup>67</sup> In Rhode Island, the highest rate of increase in poverty rates, 21%, took place for Latino children under 19.

Results of the Rhode Island Department of Health’s study of food security in the state provide a glimpse of the characteristics of poor Latino families.<sup>68</sup> This study surveyed families in areas with high prevalence of poverty to determine the level of food security among poor households. Forty-two percent of the families determined to be “food insecure” were Latino families and 85% had incomes below the poverty level. Latino households were overwhelmingly (73%) households with children and 48% had

**Table 6**

**Median household income by race – Rhode Island 2000. (\$)**

Note: Since the sample is drawn from three years of surveys (1998, 1999, and 2000), these figures approximate best the household incomes in 1999.

	<b>U.S.</b>	<b>New England</b>	<b>Rhode Island</b>
White	44,219	47,100	45,070
Black	27,652	26,120	20,164
Latino	30,384	24,000	23,000

Source: US Census 2001a and 2000b

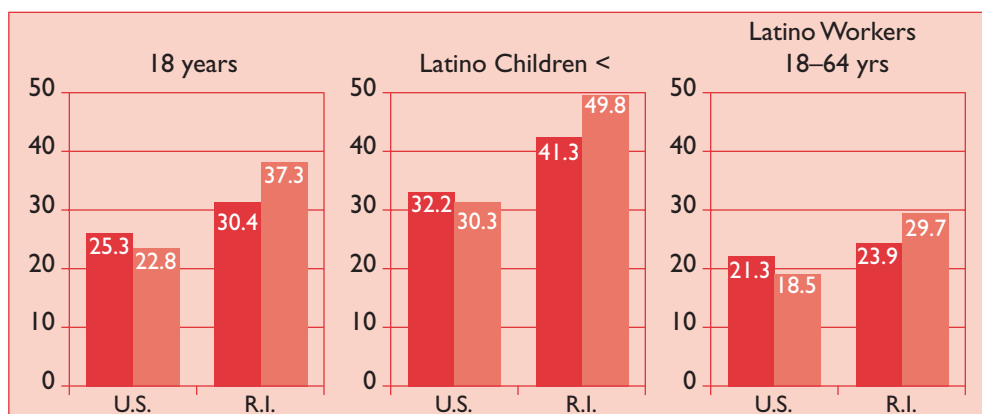
children under 6. Fifty-three percent were households where no adult was working.

## A Closer Look at Latino Poverty

Although there are differences between Rhode Island and other areas in the extent and persistence of Latino poverty, its existence and pervasiveness is not unprecedented. Since the 1970s, there has been attention in the academic literature to the higher rates of poverty found among Latinos compared with other groups, as well as variability in the experience of poverty within the Latino community. Explanations for Latino poverty<sup>69</sup> have focused on a number of factors and include some of the common themes of poverty research such as the structure of families and others specific to the Latino experience as immigrants. Other explanations have focused on

### Figures 8, 9 & 10

Changes in poverty rates among Latinos – United States and Rhode Island, 1990 to 2000. Overall Latino Population; Latino Children < 18yrs; Latino Workers 18 to 64yrs



### Table 7

Characteristics of Latino families determined to be food insecure – Rhode Island, 1999 and 2000. (%)

Percent of all Latino survey respondents	41.9
	N=52
3–4 household members	50
Households with children	73.1
Households with children < 6 y.o.	48.1
No adult employed	53.8
Income below poverty <sup>a</sup>	85

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2002

a N=20; question was only asked in 2000

the determinants of low earnings for all Latinos and addressed their position in the labor force and their interaction with the labor market. From this perspective, explanations focus on the individual characteristics of the workers (such as the level of education, English proficiency, skills) as well as factors related to the structure of the labor market and discrimination Latino workers encounter.

The primary conclusion from all this work is that no factor in isolation can explain Latino poverty. It results from a complex set of social and economic factors that create labor market disadvantage. These factors include industrial restructuring, ethnic and racial discrimination, inadequate schooling and low educational attainment, compounded by the social adaptation and the problems in language proficiency that are the consequences of immigration.<sup>70</sup>

Although the particular experience of Latinos in Rhode Island bears close specific analysis, there are some findings that may begin to outline some elements of this experience.

The large number of new immigrants in the population alone does not explain the high rates of Latino poverty in Rhode Island. The effect of the large number of immigrants and newcomers among Latinos is frequently mentioned as an explanation for their lower incomes and the higher rates of poverty. The adaptation to a new environment and a new language often results in lower incomes for immigrants, particularly for those immigrants that arrive with low levels of education and lower and/or different work skills than those required in the United States. But the evidence both nationally and in Rhode Island suggests that the effects of adaptation may be temporary, with immigrants attaining higher levels of income in a reasonably short time.

A look at poverty among cohorts of Latino immigrants and persons arriving from Puerto Rico reveals that poverty, in fact, is greatest among those recently arrived: 57.6% of those that have been in the US only since 1995 were poor (see Figure 11). But it also shows that immigrants, who have been in the US for 10 years, already have rates of poverty similar to those that have been in the US much longer. In Rhode Island, the highest levels of poverty are found among US-born Latinos and persons born in Puerto Rico, the non-immigrant sectors of the Latino population. As is true of Latinos nationally, immigration appears to be a factor that aggravates an already disadvantageous labor market position that affects all Latinos.

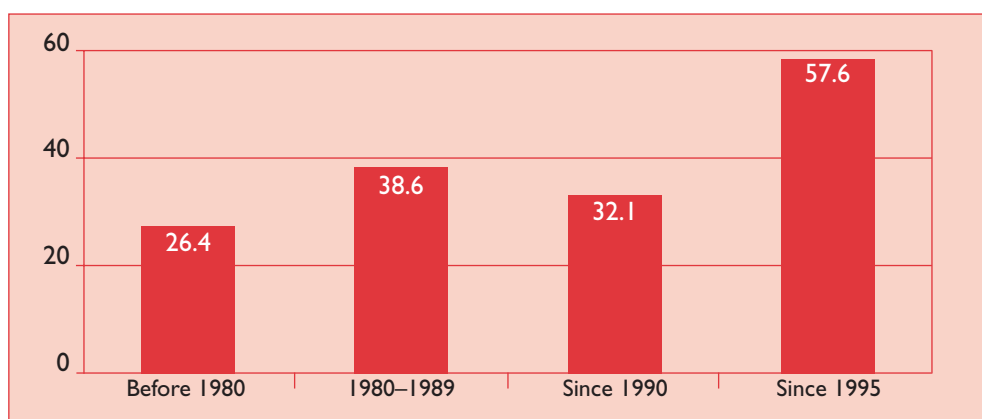
Comparison of incomes of Latino households by nativity confirm that although immigrants are economic vulnerable, Puerto Ricans and especially Puerto Ricans that migrate from the island appear to have even higher economic vulnerability. Of all households headed by Puerto Ricans, regardless of place of birth, 52% had incomes of less than \$15,000 a year (median income for Puerto Ricans in Rhode Island was

\$14,238, the lowest of all groups). But household incomes of less than \$15,000 were found among 70% of the households headed by a person that migrated from Puerto Rico, indicating that this sub-group is even more economically vulnerable.

Household incomes tend to be somewhat higher among Dominicans (median income is \$26,000) and Central and South Americans (\$21,800). Household incomes are affected by the number of household members who are earning an income as well as

**Figure 11**

Percent of Latino immigrant and migrant cohorts with incomes below the federal poverty level – Rhode Island, 2000.



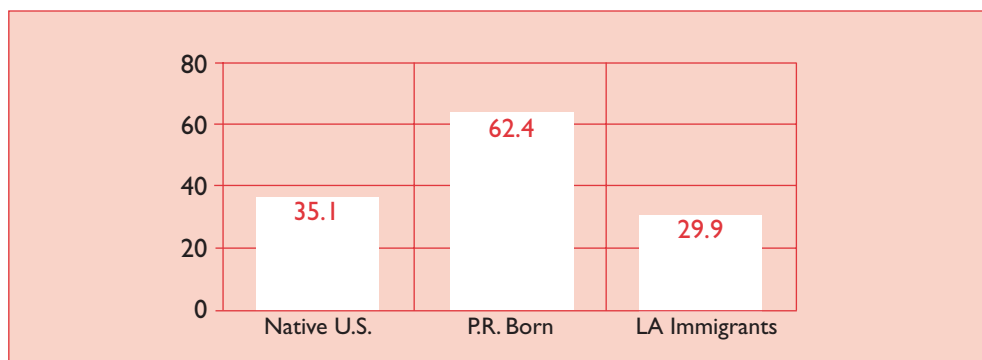
Note a: persons born in Puerto Rico

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

**Figure 12**

Percent of US born, migrant a and immigrant Latinos with incomes below the federal poverty level – Rhode Island, 2000.

Note a: persons born in Puerto Rico



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

the types of work that members perform. In this context, households headed by one adult are at a disadvantage, as are households where most workers labor for very low wages, as is the case of undocumented immigrants.

Forty percent of Latino households in Rhode Island are headed by a single adult. Having more than one adult breadwinner in the family is protection against economic vulnerability and poverty. Among the poor, there is often an over-representation of families headed by a single person, usually a woman.

Latino leaders in Rhode Island often mentioned that an important asset of the community is the fact that it is largely made up of families. This perception seems to be correct: most of Rhode Island Latino households are made up of families (80%), a higher percentage of families than found among Latinos nationally and regionally. Sixty-two percent of all Latino households are families with children, also higher than Latinos nationally and regionally.

Even though this is the case, many of these families may be economically vulnerable they are headed by a single adult: 40.3% of Latino households are headed by a single person. Among households made up of families with children, 33.4% are headed by

**Table 8**

Latino household incomes by immigrant status and selected national groups – Rhode Island, 2000.

Note: Persons born in Puerto Rico

	<b>Native Born</b>	<b>Migrant<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Puerto Rican</b>	<b>Central/ South American</b>	<b>Other (Dominican)</b>
Less than \$10,000	2	38	26	28	28	10
\$10,000 to \$14,999	15	32	11	24	11	16
\$15,000 to \$24,999	19	11	12	14	14	21
\$25,000 to \$34,999	9	8	18	9	18	13
\$35,000 to \$49,999	9	0	18	2	17	9
\$50,000 to \$74,999	32	12	9	21	8	14
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11	0	6	2	4	13
\$100,000 or more	3	0	0	0	0	5

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000b and 2001a

a single adult. Latinos in Rhode Island have the higher incidence of single-headed families than Latinos nationally and regionally.

Latinos have the highest level of unemployment of any racial/ethnic group in the state, according to data from the Current Population Survey. The unemployment rate for Latinos was 2.28 times that of whites and higher than that of Blacks. The labor force participation of Latinos, at 65.2% of those 16 and over is slightly lower than that of Blacks.

Most Latinos work in low-level manufacturing and service jobs. Information from the Current Population Survey shows that 43.1% of Latino workers are employed in manufacturing and 28.9% labor in the service industries. Forty-one percent of Latino workers are laborers. Although clearly a more in-depth analysis of the situation of Latinos working in each of these sectors is warranted, information from interviews conducted for this study<sup>71</sup> underscores that Latinos in the service sector tend to work in entry-level jobs (for example, cleaning and maintenance in hotels and office buildings) for minimum wage. Many Latinos that work in the agricultural, service, and

**Table 9**

Composition of Households – United States, Northeast and Rhode Island, 2000. (%)

Types of Households	U.S.		Northeast		Rhode Island	
	Total	Latino	Total	Latino	Total	Latino
Families with Related Children						
Headed by married couple	24.8	38.2	23.7	26.5	21.9	28.9
Headed by single female	8.3	13.6	7.5	25.5	8.6	28.2
Headed by single male	2.4	5.1	2.0	4.6	2.0	5.2
Families without Children						
Married couple	26.9	15.7	27.0	12.1	26.3	10.5
Single	5.7	7.4	5.7	7.4	6.2	7.2
Non-family households	31.9	20.0	34.2	23.8	35.0	20.1

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000a

**Table 10**

Labor force status of workers 16 years and over by race – Rhode Island, 2000.

	Employed	Unemployed	Not in Labor Force	Unemployment Rate
White	64.1	2.6	33.3	3.9
Black	58.8	4.6	36.6	7.3
Latino	59.4	5.8	34.8	8.9
Total	63.6	2.9	33.5	4.3



manufacturing sectors are employed through temporary agencies that employ workers by the day, pay marginal wages, and provide few, if any, benefits.

Latinos, as a group, have the lowest levels of educational attainment of any group in Rhode Island. Educational attainment is a factor closely associated with labor market outcomes. Data from the Current Population Survey show that 47.9% of Latinos had an educational attainment of 12 grades or less (less than high school) compared to 17.2% of whites and 35.2% of Blacks. Rhode Island Latinos have a higher percentage of persons with this level of education than the Latino population nationally, although there is a higher percentage of a high school graduates in Rhode Island than found nationally. Of the national-origin groups in Rhode Island, Dominicans appear to have the lowest incidence of persons at the low levels of educational attainment, while Central and South Americans show the highest percentages at this level.<sup>72</sup> Puerto Ricans show a bimodal performance, having high percentages of persons with low educational attainment but also the highest percentage of persons at the higher levels.

In sum, the rate of Latino poverty in Rhode Island is high and has increased even in the midst of the economic prosperity of the 1990s. Poverty in households with children is particularly high. Explanations for the high rates of Latino poverty empha-

**Table 11**

Years of school completed by population 25 years and over by race and ethnicity – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)

	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Latino</b>
12 <sup>th</sup> grade or less	19.5	17.2	35.2	47.9
High school graduate	31.4	31.5	41.3	28.9
Some college, no degree or AA degree	22.3	23.0	19.0	14.0
B.A. degree or higher	26.8	28.2	4.6	9.2

**Table 12**

Years of school completed by Latinos 25 years and over – US and Rhode Island, 2000. (%)

	<b>U.S.</b>	<b>Rhode Island</b>
12 <sup>th</sup> grade or less	43.9	47.9
High school graduate	26.9	28.9
Some college, no degree or AA degree	18.3	14.0
B.A. degree or higher	10.8	9.2

Source: US Census Bureau 2001(a), 2000(b); 2000(c)

size both personal and family characteristics as well as the particular insertion of Latinos into the local labor markets. In Rhode Island, Latinos appear to be concentrated in the declining manufacturing sectors and in those areas of the growing service industry where salaries are low and conditions are precarious. Latinos have experienced much higher levels of unemployment than other groups in the state, while retaining similar commitment to their participation in the labor force. Their engagement in the labor force is mediated by factors related to their immigrant or migrant status, such as lack of English-language proficiency and low levels of skills. Rates of poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island seem to be highest among newly-arrived immigrants and Puerto Ricans, both migrants and native born, but particularly the former.

The level and persistence of poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island warrants attention on the part of policymakers, researchers and community leaders because of the impact of poverty on almost every area of life: education, health status, and the capacity for self-sufficiency and stability of families.

The complexity of factors related to poverty among Latinos requires approaches that are both multifaceted and comprehensive if they are to alleviate the effects of poverty. Improvements in education, the development of employment and training programs, and the wide availability of ESL and adult basic education programs are common approaches. More innovative programs have sought to integrate employment and training programs with industrial promotion and affirmative action programs and to develop and implement community economic development strategies that promote labor market success.<sup>73</sup>

## 4. Building Community Strength, Growing Community Power

In interviews conducted for this report, Latino leaders and Latino providers were asked to reflect on the accomplishments and assets of the Latino community of Rhode Island. The most often mentioned strengths of this community were its continued efforts to organize itself and attain visibility and power within the state. Latino leaders, Latino organizations and businesses, and the success Latinos have experienced in the electoral arena are sources of community pride. And well they should be, reflecting many years of consistent struggle.

It is impossible to do justice in a report such as this to the organizational process that has formed this community. But some brief remarks may serve to contextualize this process and highlight its relevance to community services and community needs.

Informal caregivers were the initial element of social support in this community. In many ways, the story of this community begins like that of many other Latino immigrant and migrant communities: with informal caregivers and networks providing the first line of support for community members.<sup>74</sup> Marta Martínez's earlier accounts of the history of the different Latino groups highlight the role of these informal caregivers and the significance of their support to the adjustment of immigrants that followed them.<sup>75</sup>

Small community organizations have formed out of these networks. These organizations are sustained almost exclusively by community resources. These small community organizations focus on cultural maintenance and recreation for the community. The organizations oriented to cultural maintenance and dissemination organize a variety of cultural events, teach music and dance to children, and organize yearly Latino festivals. Almost every national group has representative cultural organizations: they include Puertorriqueños Unidos, Quisqueya en Acción, Alma Peruana, Asociación Cultural Mexicana, Guatemaltecos Unidos, la Asociación Boliviana de la Virgen de Urkupiña, the Colombian American Cultural Society, las Perlitas de México, Los Caporales, and many others.

Sports leagues are another community sustained resource. Both soccer (played primarily by the Central and South American groups) and baseball leagues (played by the Caribbean groups) are present in Rhode Island, organized for both adults and children.

These small, community-based and community-supported institutions are still the most prevalent organizational form in this community in Rhode Island.

Small businesses were the first visible representation of the Latino presence in Rhode Island. Small *bodegas* and restaurants along Broad Street in Providence and in Central Falls have been the center of Latino social and economic activity for decades. *Bodegas*, especially, are a critical presence: they are one- and two-person businesses that provide Latino groceries, newspapers, music, and other amenities.

As the community grew in numbers and its needs overwhelmed the informal networks and the possibilities of the small community-sustained organizations, more formal community service organizations were developed to provide basic supportive services and to advocate on Latino issues. By 1970, the first organization was formed by Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans in Action. That year, the first pan-Latino organization also came to be, the Latin American Community Center. Other organizations followed that focused on community-wide issues: Club Juvenil, Orientación Hispana, Acción Hispana (later Progreso Latino), Proyecto Persona, La Comunidad en Acción. These provided a range of supportive services that included adult literacy and English language education, assistance with specific problems, translation and interpretation services, and many others.

Service coordination and advocacy organizations, such as the Coalition of Hispanic Organizations and the Hispanic Social Services Committee, the precursor of the present Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA), also developed with the mission to network and coordinate the work of Latino human services organizations and Latino workers working for mainstream organizations and thus improve service delivery to Latinos in the area. The Coalition of Hispanic Organizations began this process by positing that public service institutions had a responsibility to provide services to the Latino community and advocated for this. “This was the agency that gave respect to the community,” said Victor Mendoza, “that fought against police brutality... that fought the hospital that did not have any bilingual workers... that fought the school department to have some representation of teachers.”<sup>76</sup> The Hispanic Social Services Association (and later CHisPA) would continue in this tradition.

In some Latino communities, including communities in the region, informal networks and small community-based service initiatives have tended to evolve into a system of community-based service organizations that provide the first line of care to Latinos. These organizations are usually not solely supported from community resources. In many ways, they represent a partnership: the Latino community provides the organizing capacity, which, with support from outside resources, provides the basis for a network of services. Outside supports from funds and technical assistance have come from a variety of sources beginning with the early War on Poverty programs during the 1960s and 1970s and a number of other federal funds, through contracts with state and local governments for the provision of specific services, to funding from private sources such as the local United Way, and local and national foundations and corporations.

This pattern is not yet as evident in Rhode Island. During the 1980s and 1990s different factors would conspire to reduce the availability of community-service organizations to two agencies: Progreso Latino in Central Falls, founded 25 years ago, and the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA) in Providence founded 15 years ago.<sup>77</sup> It has been a challenge to expand these organizations and/or develop additional services with the limited technical and financial support from outside resources that these organizations have enjoyed. Only Progreso Latino is a United Way agency; state contracts are sporadic and provide little in the way of budgets; and the availability of private resources is unpredictable.<sup>78</sup> There is a sense that these agencies have survived in spite of great odds: in spite of both the benign neglect of the official service and funding systems and the stress of internal community tensions generated by the politics of scarcity. Yet, their survival is one of the community’s greatest accomplishments. According to Victor Capellán, “These agencies have provided services to people day in and day out, they have provided advocacy and policy guidance on many issues. They have kept the Latino agenda on the table in Rhode Island.”<sup>79</sup>

Rhode Island Latinos have sought to obtain visibility and influence by direct participation in mainstream institutions and by wielding very aggressive electoral activism. “One of our great challenges is the lack of consideration at the state and city levels for the critical social problems Latinos face,” says a Latino elected official. “There is a need to be active politically so that our needs can be placed at the table where decisions are made. We have very few voices at that level and the sense is that, aside from them, very few care,” says a community activist. “The Latino agenda,” says another community leader, “is not a unique agenda ... what is good for Latinos is good for the community at large.” Working to break out of the isolation of the community has entailed advocating for hires and appointments of Latinos to positions in government and social institutions, actively working to place Latinos on boards and in other public-service activities directed to the broader community, engaging non-Latinos in the work of the community, and achieving direct political representation.

The inclusion of Latinos in state and city government and on the staffs of social institutions has proved to be a challenging task but a high priority. “When Latinos are in leadership positions, things improve...” says Luisa Murillo, executive director of CHisPA. “They can address policies that are detrimental to Latinos, add policies that respond to community needs and bring resources to bear without veering from their mission and their responsibility to serve everyone. One example is the appointment of Superintendent Diana Lam: we have seen more diversity in the staff of the Providence School Department as a direct result of her leadership. Another is the legislative resolution on amnesty for the undocumented presented by Representative Anastasia Williams. This resolution would not have happened without having this Latino representation present.”<sup>80</sup>

Latinos have advocated the hiring and appointment of Latinos in city and state government and on the staffs of social institutions and, although there have been some Latinos hired and others appointed to boards and committees, this is clearly an area where there appear to be strong barriers to participation and inclusion. At this time, the Latino presence across the institutions of the state still lags well behind their presence in the population.

Interest in institutional representation has been closely associated with efforts to gain direct political power. “It’s a matter of empowerment,” explained Victor Capellán to the Providence Journal in 1997, “a matter of maturity and growth for our community. [An elected post] is a gift from the people, not just the appointing official.”<sup>81</sup> These efforts have been more successful. Years of laborious work registering voters, working in political campaigns, and struggling for community needs shaped a generation of Latino leaders. Anastasia Williams was the first Latina elected to the state legislature; Luis

Aponte was elected in 1998 to the Providence City Council, Leon Tejada was elected to the state legislature in 2000<sup>82</sup> followed by the win in a special election of State Representative Stella Guerra-Bryan and of Ricardo Patiño, as Central Falls city councilor, both in 2001. With the development of the Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee (RILPAC), Latinos have a vehicle for raising funds for political campaigns by Latinos and by other politicians willing to address the Latino agenda.<sup>83</sup> “It may be that our Latino candidate did not win but the issues that the Latino candidate put forth had to be picked up by other candidates and had to be addressed,” expressed Pablo Rodriguez, a founder of RILPAC.<sup>84</sup>

There are great challenges in organizing such a rapidly-growing community, one that is so concerned about its economic survival and also so tremendously diverse. These challenges are well-known to Latinos in Rhode Island, and their efforts over several decades are a clear example of how communities in very difficult circumstances embrace more organizational activity than is apparent to outsiders. This does not mean that there are no problems or disagreements; there are. Or, that the process of organizational and institutional development moves linearly to evident goals; it doesn't. But Latinos are learning the skills of leadership and of leading. It may take longer, and although there is much to go to gain full political representation for Latinos in Rhode Island, the organizing work of many years is beginning to bear its fruit. Says Rodriguez:

There has been a lot of underground work to get to this point that is not clear and visible [to outsiders]. The work done by the early Latinos that were here 15 years ago and were beating their heads against the wall to try to increase opportunity is paying off dividends now. This didn't happen overnight or yesterday, for that matter. It's been happening for a long time....<sup>85</sup>

The strength of this community lies in its people: they are young, with a great deal of energy to organize around community needs, and now have deep experience, a political savvy that has already been rewarded with success. They face tremendous challenges in moving this growing community forward. Some of the challenges, as described in the preceding pages, are summarized here as a jumping-off point to our discussion of specific problems in subsequent sections.

The youth of the Latino population is a wonderful future asset, but in the short run it represents a tremendous challenge. Most Latinos are school-age children, many of whom have yet to enter the school system. They come from poor families, families where English is not the dominant language. School systems have not proven themselves successful in the education of children with these characteristics, and as we will see, this too is a serious problem in Rhode Island. The education of Latino children and the adequacy of the educational system, K-12, becomes one of the critical areas for attention.

Latino families are at considerable risk for several reasons:

Most are young families without extended-family supports present. Support for childcare, problem solving, and parenting are important resources that these families will need.

Most are newcomers and are in the process of adjustment. Support in understanding and navigating the new systems, English-language classes, and adult basic education are basic areas where there is need. Families need help to address the demands placed on them by schools and systems. For example, attention needs to be paid to the capacity of families to assist their English-learning children with school work and there must be ways to encourage Latino families to engage with school systems. Attention also needs to be paid to the language and cultural competence of public services.

Most Latino families, especially Latino families with children, are poor. High levels of poverty are associated with increased health problems, low educational achievement, and increased vulnerability in almost every area of life. Guarantees of income and food, protection if housing becomes vulnerable, family supportive services, educational support for pre-schoolers and children in school, are critical services.

There are few service resources within the community to address the problems faced by these families. Community organizations are usually the first line of support for vulnerable families. The availability of supportive, culturally synchronic, easily accessible community-based services is a key factor in supporting Latino families. Culturally competent public and mainstream non-profit services are also an important source of support.

Addressing the causes of widespread poverty in this community is also an urgent need. Additional research and information about the nature of the problem is critical as is the identification of vulnerabilities and of appropriate approaches to the problem. These approaches may range from the enforcement of workers rights laws to the promotion of specific industrial development that makes use of the Latinos' labor and the enforcement of affirmative action laws in government hiring. The protection of the rights of immigrants as workers and as tenants through the current laws is also critical. Families need basic economic supports while more systemic problems are addressed.

## II. Issues in Key Areas of Latino Life in Rhode Island: Education, Economic Development, and Health and Social Support

This section focuses on specific areas of the experience of Latinos in Rhode Island: education, economic development, health and social support. Within each area, it presents a description of the issues based on existing information as well as on interviews conducted for this assessment. It also presents specific issues and needs identified by Latino leaders and by providers of services to the Latino community.

### I. The Education of Latino Children

When asked about the challenges facing Latinos in Rhode Island, most Latino leaders reported that education was their top concern. The youth of the Latino population means that almost half of the Latinos currently in Rhode Island will receive their education in a Rhode Island public school. The high number of children of immigrants and the poverty that prevails in the Latino community mean that this community possesses two of the characteristics that have continued to challenge contemporary American public education. Reversing the effects of poverty through education has been the most common route to opportunity in the United States. But for that to take place, schools must be effective in educating children. “We, not the Latino community, but the whole state, need to be able to educate Latino children in a way that they are proud of their culture, they understand where they are coming from, and they are able to succeed,” explains Dr. Pablo Rodriguez. “We have to give them all the tools necessary for success and right now the educational system is not doing that.”<sup>86</sup> Many echoed his concerns. In this section of the report, we examine as deeply as time and data allowed the situation of Latinos in Rhode Island public schools.

Questions of access and retention were the focus of discussion in regards to higher education. The “educational pipeline” for Latinos, or the movement of students from high school to higher education and their retention in college, was identified as a concern: “Latinos are not identified nor encouraged to look at higher education, explained Tomas Ramirez, President of the Board of Directors of Progreso Latino and director of science in the Providence school department.<sup>87</sup> The issue of how students are counseled in high school and admitted and supported in college was portrayed as a clear challenge.

The pace of Latino growth, the age profile of the community and the need to remediate past educational deficiencies mean that Latinos will continue to represent the largest and fastest-growing market for educators in the state. This is true for all levels: for the early childhood/daycare system, K–12 education, adult basic education



and institutions higher education.

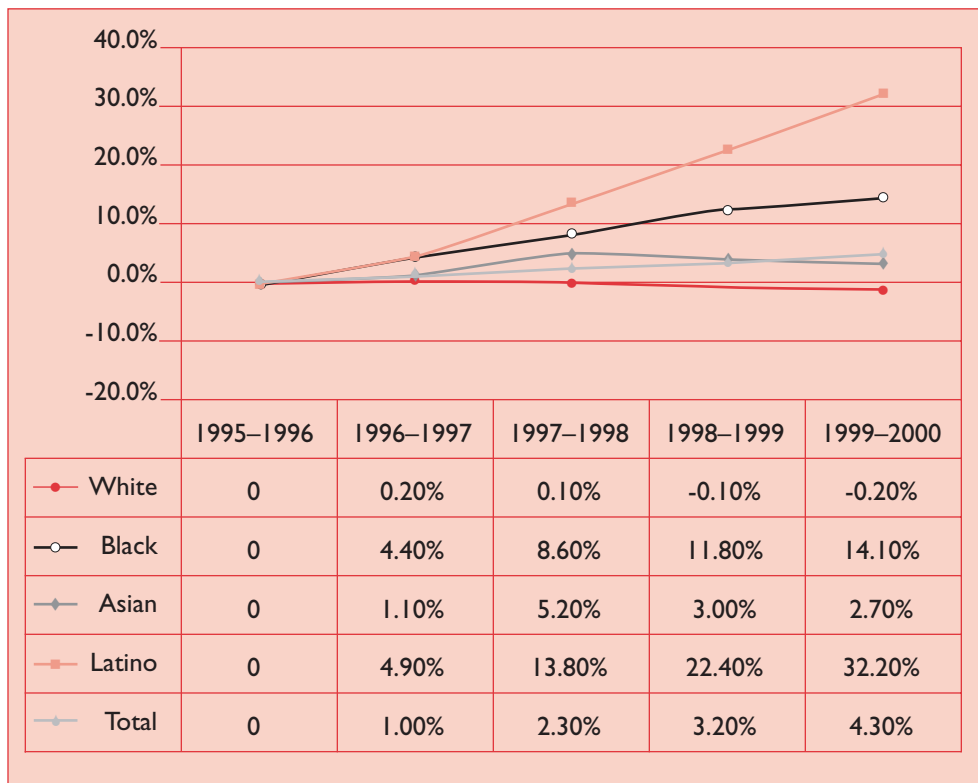
## Latino Children in Public Schools

Public school enrollment trends reflect the impact of Latino immigrants and migrants and the overrepresentation of young persons in the Latino population. A review of K–12 public school enrollments for the period 1995–2000 illustrates the pace of growth of Latino enrollments in comparison with that of other groups. The number of Latino children in Rhode Island public schools has increased by 32% in that time period, while the growth in total enrollments growth was only 4.3% (see Figure 13). The enrollments of Black and Asian children also increased, but at much slower pace, while the enrollments of white students decreased slightly.

In 1999, Latino children accounted for 13% of the children in Rhode Island public schools. The number of Latino children is largest in Providence, with 12,516 children (see Table 13). Proportionally, the presence of Latino children is strongest in Central

**Figure 13**

Changes in public school enrollments relative to 1995 by race – Rhode Island, 1996 to 1999.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2000a, 1999, 1998, 1997, 1996

Falls, where they account for 60.3%. The percentage of Latino children is also significant in Providence and Pawtucket, where they account respectively for 47.3% and 22.6% of enrollments.<sup>88</sup>

## Educational Outcomes of Latino Students

This review of educational outcomes for Latino children in Rhode Island public schools underscores their concern. It has been well documented that educational outcomes for Latino children across the nation lag well behind those of other groups. But Latino outcomes in Rhode Island public schools are even less auspicious than those attained by Latinos nationally and regionally.

For the purposes of this study, we reviewed the results of the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in math, reading, writing, and science. The NAEP tests are given every two years to 4th and 8th graders in schools across the nation in order to provide a comparison of educational outcomes across the states. Table 16 compares national, northeastern<sup>89</sup> and Rhode Island 2000 test results. In both grades

**Table 13**

Latino Public School Enrollments – Rhode Island and selected cities, 1995 to 2000.

	<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>Providence</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Central Falls</b>
1995–1996	15,351	9,670	1,688	1,528
1997–1998	17,472	11,015	1,896	1,740
1999–2000	20,294	12,516	2,243	2,025

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2000a, 1999, 1998, 1997, 1996

**Table 14**

NAEP math, reading, writing and science outcomes for Latino students in grades 4 and 8 – US, Northeast and Rhode Island, 2000. (%)

	<b>Below Basic</b>			<b>At or above proficient</b>		
<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>U.S.</b>	<b>No. East</b>	<b>R.I.</b>	<b>U.S.</b>	<b>No. East</b>	<b>R.I.</b>
Math	53	—	67	10	—	5
Reading	62	52	70	12	14	8
Science	60	—	71	10	—	4
<b>Grade 8</b>						
Math	60	—	69	9	—	4
Reading	48	46	55	14	15	10
Writing	32	35	36	10	9	7
Science	67	—	66	11	—	9

Sources: NAEP, 1999, 2001 (a and b).

and across all academic areas (except 8th grade science), a higher percentage of Latino students in Rhode Island tested below the basic level than Latino students nationally and in the northeast. Only 5% of Latino 4th graders in Rhode Island tested at or above proficient in math, compared with double that percentage nationally (see Table 14). Similar comparisons can be made of the 8th grade math results. In general, a smaller percent of Rhode Island students achieved scores at the higher levels compared with students nationally and regionally.

Compared with other test-takers in Rhode Island, Latinos students also showed the lowest outcomes. In 4th grade, less than one-third of Latino students attained the basic level of achievement in any of the subjects; Latinos had the lowest outcomes in reading and in math. In the 8th grade, Latino outcomes were the lowest of all the groups (see Figure 14).

### About Bilingual Education

Because of the high volume of recent Latino immigration to Rhode Island, it can be expected that children will have either just migrated, or have been born into a family

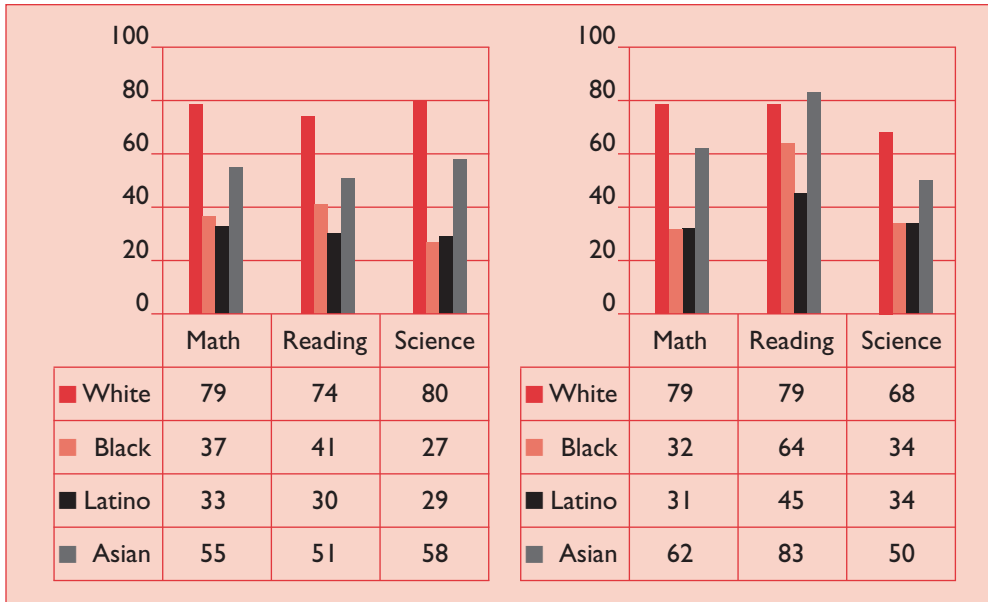
**Figure 14**

**4th and 8th grade NAEP outcomes by race – Rhode Island, 2000.**

(% at or above basic)

Grade 4-Grade 8

Note: "Basic" level reflects partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work in each grade (NAEP 2001a).



Sources for figures: NAEP, 1999, 2001 (a and b).

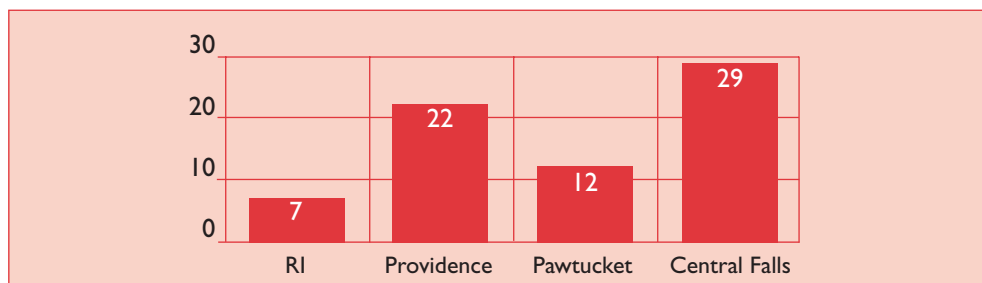
that recently arrived. These children enter the school system with particular needs in terms of linguistic support, which are addressed, by law, by bilingual education and English as a second language (ESL) programs. Examining enrollment trends in ESL and in bilingual education programs is one means of examining the availability of instructional support in this area. Rhode Island Kids' Count reports that 7% of Rhode Island school children received bilingual education or ESL in 2000, a percentage that rises to 22% in Providence and 29% in Central Falls.

Serious concerns were raised by Latino educators and parents about the process of assigning students to programs and the quality of the programs themselves. Educational staff report that there are ongoing efforts to streamline the assessment, placement, and curriculum of the bilingual education program and that these need to be continued and supported. They expressed concern that bilingual education and ESL support are often seen as “interfering” with student academic progress in mainstream programs. In addition to the problems that bilingual education programs experience in the context of the mainstream public schools, some providers raised concerns about the experience of the children in bilingual programs. The account by a staff member of the Providence School Department, was the most compelling in its account of the treatment of students in the programs to the failure of school systems to maintain Latino children in schools:

The Latino immigrant student arriving in Providence with a strong academic background from his home country is mixed in with the low-income immigrant student. Both are mixed in with Latino students raised in the US who are still in ESL programs. Latinos are in educational groups of mixed educational levels that don't respond to their needs. This mixing, coupled with the tendency to send Latino students to special education groups compounds the problem of motivation and academic achievement that leads to the high

**Figure 15**

Percent of public school children receiving ESL or Bilingual Education – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)



Source: Rhode Island Kids Count, 2001

Latino drop out rates.

## Graduating, Dropping Out

The Rhode Island Department of Education provided data on student dropout rates<sup>90</sup> for this report. In 2001, Latino dropout rates for the state was 36%, with higher percentages in Providence and Pawtucket (see Table 15). The tendency in the last three years has been for Latino drop out rates to increase across the state, except for those in Central Falls which declined between 1999 and 2001. Only the dropout rates of American Indians are higher than those of Latinos in Rhode Island. (The high rates of American Indians are probable an artifact of the small numbers of those students in those districts, according to Department of Education officials.<sup>91</sup>) Comparing Latino rates in the different cities, Pawtucket public schools have a slightly better experience in maintaining Latino children in school. Still, two out of every five Latino students is predicted to dropout in Pawtucket. This is also the case in Providence.

The problem of maintaining Latino children in school begins early, according to Dr. Cynthia Garcia Coll, Professor of Education at Brown University. The process of dropping out starts around the 4th or 5th grade when children are not taught or do not master higher-level critical thinking and analysis skills. By the middle-school level, the demand for higher-level skills increases in the classroom and widens the achievement gap between groups of students. Students that do not receive adequate instruction and support are likely to drop out as they begin to be impacted by consistent failure in their school experience. “The drop outs” says Vidal Perez of Brown University’s New England and Islands Regional Educational Lab, “are not new immigrants but Latino products of the K through 12 system.”<sup>92</sup>

The high percentage of high school dropouts among Latino students was one of the concerns most often raised by Latino leaders we interviewed. Dr. Pablo Rodriguez put it this way: “The most pressing need for Latinos in education is our dropout rate. The dropout rate is completely unacceptable. ... We are losing an entire generation to a poor educational system that does not respond to their needs.”<sup>93</sup> Rodriguez’s concerns are supported by the dropout and achievement data from NAEP tests (see Table 14 and Figure 14). It is also supported by the graduation rates of Latinos students: in 2000, only 62% of Latino students graduated from high school, the lowest graduation rate of any group in Rhode Island.

## Schools, Teachers and Children

The Providence Plan and the Providence Blueprint for Education (PROBE) have documented the dramatic changes in the composition of the student population of

the Providence public schools from 1987 to 1998. In 1987, Providence schools were evenly divided between whites and minorities; today it is a system where minorities account for about four out of every five children.<sup>94</sup> Such dramatic changes often catch

**Table 15**

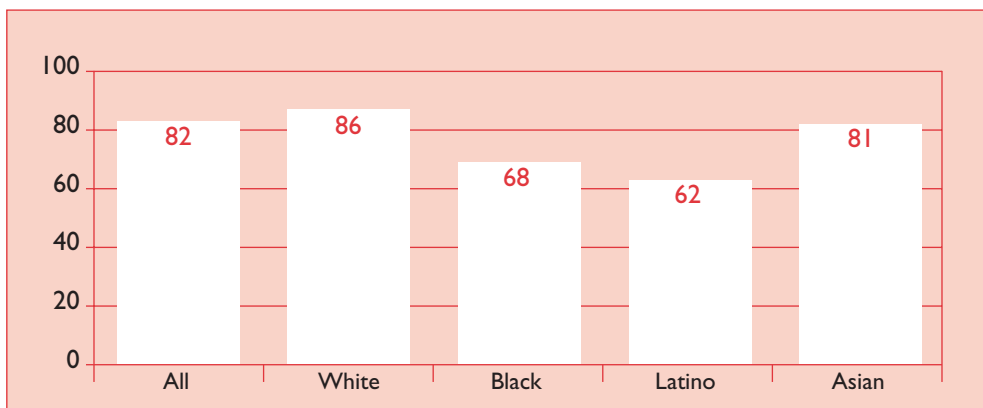
Public high school drop out rates – Rhode Island, Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls, 1999 to 2001.

		<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>Providence</b>	<b>Pawtucket</b>	<b>Central Falls</b>
American Indian	1999	49.48	89.83	0	0
	2000	22.59	34.52	62.5	0
	2001	31.39	27.27	62.5	0
Asian	1999	20.39	27.28	0	0
	2000	19.48	27.7	14.29	0
	2001	21.69	32.99	10	0
Black	1999	28.95	31.71	39.46	22.98
	2000	31.87	37.73	28.14	32.71
	2001	31.99	35.99	31.91	70.77
White	1999	14.1	27.94	32.01	42.07
	2000	14.15	32.29	32.76	39.24
	2001	14.91	32.65	37.86	21.04
Hispanic	1999	29.99	27.05	32.51	46.82
	2000	37.75	41.49	37.27	37.43
	2001	36.55	39.41	40.34	32.69

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education

**Figure 16**

High school graduation rate by race – Rhode Island, 2000.



Source: Rhode Island Kids Count, 2001

school staff unprepared and untrained to deal with the demands of such a vastly different set of students. The result, as several persons interviewed expressed, is that teaching is often not as effective as it could be in helping Latino children learn. Vidal Perez explains that often teachers are not trained to deal with the current student population. They approach the task of educating Latino children with old strategies when teachers need to reshape their ideas of how to educate this group of students, making the curricula reflect and be relevant to the lives of these children.

“Often, their approach has been almost custodial,” says Perez. “They deal with the ‘affective’ needs of the new students by conducting toy drives and clothing drives on their behalf. The attitude, however, is that these students can’t learn. Kids pick up on this by middle school and high school. They get a false sense of what they can and cannot do.”<sup>95</sup>

Building the capacity of the teacher corps currently in Rhode Island school systems that have experienced large transformations in the composition of their student population seems essential to maximize the effectiveness of these experienced teachers. On the other hand, a brisk recruitment of culturally competent teaching staff who are also competent in their areas of specialty is a priority for, for example, Providence Superintendent Diana Lam. “I want good teachers. If I can find good Latino teachers, good African American teachers, good white teachers, or good Southeast Asian teachers, I’ll take them,” says Lam, emphasizing the adjective “good.”<sup>96</sup>

## Schools, Parents and Community

Cynthia Garcia Coll, Brown University Professor of Education, speaks of the educational experience of Latino students as a bipolar experience: “There is an incredible rift between school life and the home life of Latino students, the home culture and the school culture do not support each other,” she says. But, more importantly, the children are at the fulcrum of this interaction, mediating the contradictory forces between school and home. “Kids rather than adults are the ones bridging the two worlds,” explains Dr. Garcia Coll.<sup>97</sup>

There are many elements of the clash of cultures that frames this bipolar experience. One element is the way Latinos parents and US educators perceive each other. Educators are persons of high social status in Latin America. Latinos come from countries with high illiteracy rates, where educators are valued for their intelligence, their skills, and their sacrifice. Latino families, for this reason, trust educators, particularly teachers. “Latino families relinquish authority to teachers”, says Vidal Perez, “they leave a lot to the [educational] system, but they don’t know the system.”<sup>98</sup> It is unusual for a Latino parent, particularly a parent with low educational attainment, to challenge or question

a teacher.

The other side of this coin is that schools and teachers are often not motivated to engage Latino parents. Notices from the school go out in English, without any translation. There are few mechanisms for parent involvement available to Latino parents (i.e., in their own language and taking into account the cultural issues). There are often no persons who speak Spanish available to attend to parents that visit a school. The environment is not one that is welcoming to parents. In the context of the high regard in which educators are held by Latinos, these “small” rejections are a powerful negative message to Latino parents.

Another important element in this clash of cultures is that some practices of Latino families run counter to the culture of the schools. Perhaps the most salient one relates to school attendance. In schools, children are expected to attend regularly and those that do not, suffer the consequences: they are held back, they do not learn the material, they develop a tepid attachment to the school. Attendance suffers when children are kept from school to care for an ill relative or to translate for a family member conducting some official business or attending a medical appointment. Attendance also suffers when families travel back to their countries of origin for extended periods of time with their children. The Providence Plan and the Providence Blueprint for Education (PROBE) have documented the effects of student mobility and reports that families from the Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic often leave for extended periods time around Thanksgiving and many families do not return until February or March. They report also that these absences may result from the labor migration to and from these islands, with workers traveling South during the winter tourism season and traveling back for work during the rest of the year.<sup>99</sup> “The families... are committed to education, but it seems that other things get in the way,” says Garcia Coll. “It’s a class and schooling issue and parents often do not understand the implications of the choices they are making.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps, too, parents’ choices are very constrained.

The third set of issues that affects the interaction of parents and schools pertains to the fact that many Latinos, who are relatively recent newcomers, are going through a process of adaptation that often impacts family relations, especially those pertaining to adolescent children. Schools are seldom aware of some of the unique pressures that affect the life of newcomer families and their children, assuming often that children are undergoing the usual struggles of adolescence. Issues range from the effect of extended work hours on family life and the supervision of children, to the transformation of roles within the family and the conflicts brought about by the emergence of different levels of acculturation within the same family.

Many working-class and poor immigrant parents work several jobs to provide for their



families, reducing the time available to nurture and supervise their adolescent children at a time when the whole family is undergoing very swift and profound changes. Separation from strong familial networks in the country of origin means the loss of support from grandparents and extended families, affecting the families' capacity to work and care for the children.

Many families experience changes in the roles of family members when women begin to work outside the home or when one partner finds it easier than the other to find work. Roles also change when children achieve a higher level of acculturation than their parents. Children usually adapt at a much faster rate than adults, often creating differences in the level of ease in the use of English (or the native language) and in the maintenance of the old and the adoption of new customs and habits. For example, in families where children speak English and adults do not, children often act as translators. Sometimes children are called upon to translate conversations between parents and providers that are meant to be conversations between adults; at other times children have to act as translators of their own medical and educational issues, between their doctor or their teacher and their parent. Children's ability to manage the external environment better than the adults exposes them to adult issues and places them in a situation of decision-making well before they are ready. This reversal of roles also changes the relationships of power within the family, often eroding parental controls and authority.

Another way these differences affect the family is when normal tensions during the teenage years regarding dependence/independence are exacerbated by culturally-bound practices that pit the more "traditional" customs of the country of origin with the more "liberal" practices of American society. In many ways, parents are always behind their children when it comes to familiarity and ease with US culture and society. Children may be embarrassed about their parents' accent or lack of familiarity with American social customs; parents are often fearful of the world their children inhabit, because it is unfamiliar. Depending on the capacity of the family to communicate with one another these differences can be the source of mild tension or the focus of considerable struggle within the family.

Finally, some parents are unable to meet all the expectations of the schools because of their educational background or limitations on their time. One important issue is supervising and helping students with their homework. Interviews with Latino immigrant parents have revealed that parents are often at a loss when helping their children with homework, not only because of language but because of lack of familiarity with the material. Parents' work schedules and the limitations that low-wage workers have in taking personal time to meet with a teacher or attend a school

function often conspire against their ability to meet the expectations of the schools. Flexible meeting times and phone meetings are some ways schools can maintain contact with families.

**Table 16**

**Needs and Recommendations in K through 12 Education:**

<p><b>School Related</b></p>	<p>Improve the safety of children and the general discipline in school          Improve the educational experience of Latino children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Continually review the academic outcome of Latino children</li> <li>· Improvement in the overall quality of education available to Latino children</li> <li>· Improvement in the quality of the bilingual education programs in the schools</li> <li>· Review placement of Latino children in special education groups</li> <li>· Value the academic achievement of Latino children</li> <li>· Review curricula to include material that is relevant to the lives and cultures of Latino children</li> <li>· Improve the effectiveness of teachers with new school populations through training and professional development</li> <li>· Provide role models in the school by hiring Latino teachers, school staff and administrators.</li> </ul> <p>Prevent Latino children from dropping out of school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Monitor the drop out rate of Latino children and develop programs to prevent children from abandoning school</li> <li>· Motivate children to stay in school by creating an educational environment that is welcoming and accepting of Latino children</li> <li>· Provide Latino counselors who can motivate children to stay in school and continue their education</li> </ul>
<p><b>School- Family Related</b></p>	<p>Promote parent involvement and create vehicles for its implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Improve communication between parents and school staff, addressing language barriers</li> <li>· Address parents' responsibilities and rights in the oversight of their child's education</li> </ul> <p>Provide bridges for Latino parents to understand and respond to the "schooling" expectations in their new country</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Address issues of attendance and homework support</li> <li>· Address stressors and fears that parents face in raising children in a culture different from their own.</li> </ul>
<p><b>School- Community Related</b></p>	<p>Create an environment in the community that supports the educational endeavor of schools, of children, and of families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Develop cultural programs for youth that will help solidify their connection to the values of Latino culture.</li> <li>· Develop after-school programs for children of working parents. Programs should emphasize academics, help children with homework.</li> <li>· Monitor school enrollment to assure that all school age children are in school.</li> </ul>

In all fairness, providing assistance to families in coping with all these issues is not solely the responsibility of the schools, although sensitive attention to some of them would result in a better experience for children. It is only when adults from both the schools and the community take a more active role in managing the relationship between parents and the schools that children can stop mediating this complex and often difficult relationship.

## Needs and Recommendations in K through 12 Education

Latino leaders, education providers (including teachers, a superintendent, and school staff and parents who participated in several focus groups were asked to detail pressing issues and concerns regarding the education of Latino children. Their responses, summarized in Table 16, focus on the needs and recommendations relating to the experience of children in school, the relationship between the students' families and the schools and the links between school and community.

**School-related Issues:** Parents in focus groups addressed, first of all, the concern for the safety of their children in the public schools: parents felt that there was a lack of discipline in the schools and that there was a lack of overall safety. The educational quality of the school—both the bilingual and regular programs—was also a great concern of parents shared by leaders and providers. Recommendations focused on improvement in the climate in the schools, increasing the academic expectations, and the alleviation of the problem of misplacement of Latino children in special education. Other recommendations focused on the adults with direct contact with Latino children. Respondents identified the need for school personnel to prepare themselves for the new populations in the schools, learning about their cultures and the ways in which they learn. Recommendations included professional development for teachers and the hiring of Latino teachers, counselor and administrators.

**Table 16 (continued)**

Needs and Recommendations in K through 12 Education:

Other issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve funding for urban public education; equalizing resources of urban schools to those available in suburban systems</li><li>• Monitor the certification of teachers to assure adequate skills for the area in which they teach</li><li>• Improve consistency of offerings across bilingual education programs in different schools and systems</li><li>• Improve data gathering and analysis in systems so that accurate information about student outcomes and dropout rates is available</li></ul>
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In regards to the high dropout rates of Latino students, respondents felt that the culture of the schools and lack of acceptance of Latino children were factors. Several discussed the need to address the values and environment that frame the day-to-day school experience of children. These include nurturing environments, high expectations, and relevant curricula.

**School/Community issues:** The discussion focused on two ways in which community organizations can support the educational work of the schools with Latino children. The first recommendation was to involve community organizations in providing activities directed to the maintenance of culture among Latino children. The suggestions ranged from language classes to dance and music, to the history and culture of the countries of origin. The second area involved after-school academic support for children of working parents and for children whose parents are not able to help them with academic work or homework. The concern here was that in some families the adults were illiterate or were not versed enough in English to be helpful to their children in academic support.

**School/Family issues:** The discussion focused on ways to improve the participation of parents in the education of their children. Parents especially expressed that the schools needed to be more sensitive to the fact that they are learning to live here, including learning to interact with teachers and school personnel. Parents suggested that schools hold orientations and other regular communication in Spanish. To encourage parental engagement and participation, greater outreach efforts will be required. The Providence School Department's new office for "Family and Community Partnerships" is an effort to address this need that merits support and evaluation.

## Improving Access to Higher Education

Latinos are the second fastest growing racial/ethnic group in Rhode Island institutions of higher education, according to the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the enrollments are quite low: only 3,500 Latino students attend Rhode Island colleges and universities, and many of these include students that come from other areas of the United States and Latin America. The low rates of graduation from Rhode Island high schools is surely a factor. But Latinos interviewed also reported that students are not encouraged or supported by their high schools and their teachers to pursue schooling and higher education. The problems of lower expectations encountered by students throughout their school careers continue to make an impact as they set off to further their education. Providers also reported that Latinos face barriers in managing the admissions process. Because most Latinos are the first in their families to attend college or to attend college in the US students they find that their parents have little insight into the US higher education system and cannot be very helpful in

the mechanics of the application processes. Others encountered barriers posed by admissions office rules and criteria, for example, language testing rules that worked against Latino students. For example, institutions usually accept the TOEFL scores (Test of English as a Foreign Second Language) for international students as a means of meeting basic English proficiency requirements, but local Latino students had to pass the English language tests of mainstream students. Finally, many Latinos who are undocumented immigrants encounter barriers in obtaining financial aid for higher education.

Aside from the barriers to access, Hispanic retention in higher education is also a concern. Being the first in their families to attend college in the US they encounter problems in assimilating into the culture of colleges and universities. Other problems may include the lack of adult role models in these institutions and the significant

**Table 17**

Enrollment in institutions of higher education by racial ethnic group – Rhode Island, 2000.

	Public		Independent		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
White	26552	69.0	26929	72.4	53481	70.7
Black	1600	4.2	2015	5.4	3615	4.8
Latino	1912	5.0	1602	4.3	3514	4.6
Asian	983	2.6	1826	4.9	2809	0.4
Native American	159	0.4	113	0.3	272	3.7
Other <sup>a</sup>	7252	18.8	4690	12.6	11942	15.8

**Table 18**

Recommendations in the area of higher education:

· Motivate Latino students to go on to college.
· Improve access to higher education by:
· Improving counseling process in high schools so that Latino children are motivated to continue their education
· Creating mechanisms that will allow undocumented Latinos to attend institutions of higher education
· Developing access programs that target Latino students
· Targeting the adult Latino student with programs that take into account that they are workers and parents as well as students
· Increase numbers of Latino faculty and administrators in local, especially state universities

isolation that Latino students feel in predominantly white institutions.

The discussion of needs in the area of higher education focused primarily on issues of access. The problems of continuity from high school and the barriers to accessing higher education, including those of the undocumented, were highlighted. Specific recommendations included: (1) improving the counseling process in the high schools, making continuing their education a preferred alternative for Latino students, (2) developing access programs that will facilitate the process of admissions for students who are first-generation college applicants; (3) increasing the numbers of Latino faculty and staff and Rhode Island colleges and universities who can both attract and support Latino students.

## Economic Development:

### Jobs, Small Business Development and Housing

Issues related to the economic well-being of the Latino community were given high priority among the set of concerns discussed by community leaders, providers, and community members in interviews and focus groups. Given the level of poverty in the community and the fact that most Latino poverty is related to labor-market disadvantage, problems concerning jobs were seen as highly relevant. So, too, were concerns about the development of local businesses, a key element of the community's organizational infrastructure and identity. We address both of these areas in this section, ending with a brief discussion of the housing regarding for Latinos in Rhode Island.

### Latinos and Jobs

The primary concern of community activists in dealing with the employment status of Latinos is the dearth of jobs available. "Latinos worked in textiles and jewelry. Now we have only 15% of the textile factories we used to have in Rhode Island since many of these factories have moved to Tennessee, South Carolina, and Mexico," says Mario Bueno, from Progreso Latino in Central Falls. "During the last ten years, plastic manufacturing companies, that also employed many Latinos, closed because of economic problems."<sup>102</sup> Bueno's observation and that of other activists match the reality: most Latinos in Rhode Island work in those areas of the economy that have experienced the most job loss.

Figure 17 presents documentation by the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation of employment change by industrial sector in the state from 1988 to 1998 and the percent of all Latino workers that were employed in each sector in 2000, as reported by the three years of the Current Population Survey analyzed for this report. The

industrial sector that suffered the sharpest decline in jobs (a loss of 33.5% of all jobs) was manufacturing. This was also the sector that employed the largest percentage of Latino workers, 43.1%. According to Bueno, Latinos work in the plastic and packing industries, and in the jewelry industry.

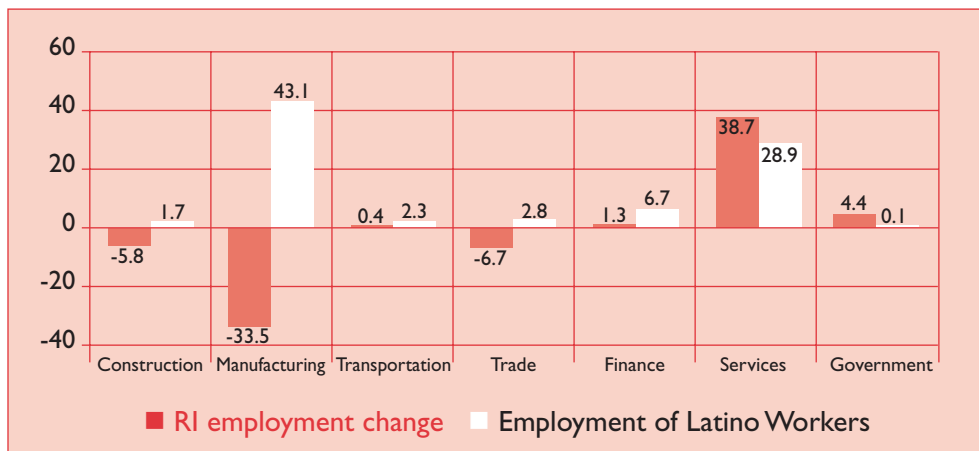
The over-representation of Latinos in manufacturing is underscored by the large number of Latinos employed as laborers and operators. Forty percent of Latinos have this occupation compared with 10.7% of whites and 22.7% of Blacks. Salaries are low for these occupations: \$7 or \$8 per hour, reports Bueno, explaining that his office receives many complaints about factories paying less than the minimum wage. This is clearly a vulnerable sector of the economy and it is also the basis of the livelihood of the largest number of Latinos.

Latinos were also well-represented in the service sector, the industry that grew fastest from 1988 to 1998. Bueno explains that many Latinos work in low-wage jobs in the service sector, that are also in short supply: “Rhode Island does not have enough service jobs for Latinos,” he explains, “and that is why many workers travel daily to Boston to work, for example, in cleaning services for large office buildings.” Latinos in this sector often work for temporary employment agencies, often for minimum wage, and with few, if any, benefits.

Less than 1% of Latinos work in government, according to Bueno. Latinos make up about 2% of the state, city, and federal government labor force in Rhode Island.

**Figure 17**

Employment change by industry in Rhode Island between 1988 and 1998 and the employment by industry of Latino workers 16 years and older in 2000. (%)



Sources: RI employment change: the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, 1999, p. 12; Latino employment: US Census 2001a and 2000b

The specific numbers are hard to come by. The State Equal Opportunity Office reports employment of minorities as a whole and not disaggregated by group. As of June 30, 2001, 10% of the state's total workforce was listed as "minority." More than half worked as paraprofessionals, in administrative support, skilled crafts, and maintenance.<sup>103</sup>

Improving access to "good jobs." Education and training were cited as an important route to better job opportunities, by Latino leaders, community members, and providers. Almost half of the Latinos over 25 years old have an educational attainment of less than high school and two out of every five high school students drop out of school. In order to aspire for better than low-wage, entry-level jobs, young people will need to complete their education outside the public school system in Adult Basic Education and GED classes. Immigrants and non-English speakers will require English-language instruction and basic literacy training in both English and Spanish. There was very little quantitative information about the availability and utilization of ESL, ABE, and GED instruction at the state level by Latinos. But all seems to indicate that the demand greatly outstrips the availability of educational opportunities in this area. Providers report long waiting lists for ESL classes. For example, the International Institute "has 1600 clients on the waiting list, twice as long as the number of clients that can be served; at the current rate it might take three years to get to the end,"<sup>104</sup> explains the William Shuey, executive director of the agency. There are only five agencies in the state providing adult education services that are frequented by Latinos and most lack funding for these programs.<sup>105</sup> There is a clear sense that the actual demand for these services far outstrips the current availability of ESL, GED, and Adult Basic Education Services.

Job training is also a critical need, but there are even fewer resources in this area, Carolina Bernal, education coordinator of the Institute for Labor Studies, explains that the objective of job training is to give Latinos the opportunity to learn new work skills so that they can increase their chances of getting jobs in the higher-paying areas of the economy. The Institute for Labor Studies, which together with the International

**Table 19**

Occupations of workers 16 years and older by race – Rhode Island, 2000. (%)

	<b>Management and Professional</b>	<b>Technical, sales and administration</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Precision Production and Craft</b>	<b>Operator, Laborer</b>
White	33.5	31.3	14.5	9.1	10.7
	19.2	32.3	17.9	7.9	22.7
	7.8	21.5	15.9	13.8	41.9
Asian	31.4	30.5	14.9	9.3	13.1



Institute in Providence is one of the few centers offering job training services, has found that Latinos in these programs often have problems maintaining their attendance because of lack of childcare or because they work more than one job and find it hard to attend training after so many hours of work.

Recommendations in this area included: linking training to jobs and developing training programs for work beyond entry-level jobs.

**Defending the rights of workers:** Another important area relates to better enforcement of laws protecting workers. This is true for all workers, but the erosion of rights is particularly salient for undocumented workers. Specific concerns in this regard include the enforcement of minimum-wage laws and the prosecution of employers who abuse workers by not paying them or by forcing them to work under dangerous conditions. There were also many respondents concerned about the enforcement of equal opportunity employment, particularly in relation to employment in state and city government. The work of United Community Workers in Progreso Latino in Central Falls was often mentioned as a program that helped Latino workers, particularly immigrant workers, to learn about their rights as workers, and develop strategies for defending their rights.

## Latino Businesses

Latino small businesses in Rhode Island have two roles in this community. The first is

**Table 20**

Needs and recommendations regarding jobs and employment:

• Lack of English as a Second Language and Adult Education Classes
• Increase the number of available slots in adult ESL, GED and Adult Basic Education
• Slots should be placed in agencies with an established track record of serving Latinos
• Slots should be open to undocumented Latinos
• Lack of Job training for work in the growing sectors of the Rhode Island economy
• Training should be linked to jobs (many Latinos in RI work more than one job and do not have the time to engage in activities outside their job)
• Training should include areas beyond entry level jobs
• Child care must be made available to women trainees
• Need to educate, advocate and enforce laws protecting workers' rights, for example, rights to a minimum wage, right to get paid for work performed, rights to equal opportunity employment
• Information and analysis about labor market placement and outcomes for Latinos

their role as a community resource in a with few other formal organizations. Together with the cultural organizations they provide a visible presence of the community in Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and other areas of the state. Marta Martinez's discussion of the early development of these businesses and business areas provides a background for this important role,<sup>106</sup> which we described in the previous section of this paper. In this section, we focus on the second role, the small business as an economic entity in the community. In 2001, the US Bureau of the Census published the results of the 1997 Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises. Rhode Island has 2,186 Latino-owned businesses, with receipts of \$207 million and employing 1,890 persons (see Table 21). Central and South Americans own 42.7% of the Latino businesses in the state while Dominicans own 34.9% and Puerto Ricans 7.7%.<sup>107</sup>

The highest percentage of Latino firms, 36.8%, is found in the service industry (see Table 22). These appear to be very small firms employing one person, sometimes

**Table 21**

Latino-owned firms: sales and number of employees – Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut, 1997.

	<b>Latino Population</b>	<b># of firms</b>	<b>Sales and Receipts</b>	<b># of employees</b>
Rhode Island	90,820	2,186	207 million	1,890
Massachusetts	428,729	12,725	1.6 billion	11,146
Connecticut	320,323	6,594	1.2 billion	9,570

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001c

**Table 22**

Latino-owned firms by industry, – Rhode Island, 1997.

	<b># of firms</b>	<b>% of Latino firms</b>	<b># of employees</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, etc.	12	.5	n/a
Construction	153	6.9	n/a
Manufacturing	68	3.1	274
Transportation	66	3.1	n/a
Wholesale Trade	22	1.0	n/a
Retail Trade	454	20.8	692
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	61	2.8	n/a
Services	805	36.8	705
Other	544	24.9	n/a

Sources: US Bureau of the Census, 2001c

less. These firms include providers of services, such as cleaners, beauticians, etc. It also includes a sizeable number of professional services, such as translating services and publicity, that begin to capitalize on the language and cultural resources of the Latino community. Firms in the service sector employ the highest number of workers.

The second-highest number of firms is found among retail trade establishments. These include the *bodegas*, for example, and are very small establishments, employing one or two people, but most employing only one. Falling far behind, but in third place is construction firms owned by Latinos.

### Needs and Recommendations in Regards to Latino Businesses

When asked about the most pressing issues facing the Rhode Island Latino community, economic development was the second issue mentioned most often. In their discussion of economic development, many focus group participants focused on small businesses and specifically, on ways to help small businesses become more stable and grow (see Table 23).

Building the capacity of Latino businesses was the first concern. “Latino businesses are just in their infancy and still small scale,” explained a community leader. “We need to build their capacity beyond Mom-and-Pop *bodegas* and restaurants: we need to increase their ability to exercise more economic clout,” said another. In many ways, they explained, Latino business owners have yet to see the benefits of fully participating in mainstream economic structures and often maintain a very informal infrastructure. Problems in accounting, for example, often lead to the failure in obtaining credit from banks, so businesses have to operate through “black market” lenders that charge very high interest rates. “Small business owners get into problems with taxes because they do not understand the law,” said yet another community activist.

**Table 23**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build capacity of Latino businesses in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tax responsibilities</li> <li>Accounting and Record keeping</li> <li>Regulatory requirements (licenses, permits, etc.)</li> <li>Management of small businesses</li> <li>Loans and credit</li> <li>Marketing beyond the Latino community</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information pertaining to opening and maintaining small business in Spanish</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase political and economic voice of Latino businesspersons</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection against discrimination in accessing credit for small businesses</li> </ul>

## Needs Identified in the Area of Small Business Development

Outreach to Latino businesses on the part of federal and state business development programs that provide tax incentives and technical assistance to businesses in the area have been marginally successful. There is no special emphasis placed on the needs of this particular group of businesses and therefore informational materials are not linguistically accessible, and it is often difficult to comply with requirements of participation because they often involve activities during business hours, of which owners of one-person firms cannot attend.<sup>108</sup> So, although Latino businesses may part of government initiatives such as the Enterprise Zones and the Enterprise Communities, they are often largely untouched by their benefits.<sup>109</sup>

Latino leaders and economic development providers identified access to technical assistance and improvements in access to pertinent information as important first steps. Technical assistance with regulatory requirements such as licenses and permits, accounting, and meeting tax responsibilities are critical needs. Assistance in developing business plans and other documents that will allow for more effective efforts in obtaining credit is also needed. Finally, technical assistance in marketing of, for example, Latino restaurants, is necessary to attract business from outside the community. In a community where money is so scarce, reaching out beyond its members is a critical step.

A voice for Latino business. Support for the newly-formed Hispanic-American Chamber of Commerce of Rhode Island and its role in representing the interests of Rhode Island Latino businesses was also mentioned as an important need. Founded in 2000, this organization has 35 members who work on a volunteer basis to provide supportive services to Latino business people while forging relationships with city and state organizations and other chambers of commerce in Rhode Island and other states.

## Housing Latinos

Rhode Island's Latinos are, overwhelmingly, renters. Homeownership rates for Latinos in the state, at 21.3%, are below those of Latinos nationally and in New England (see Figure 18). The highest rate of homeownership is found among Latinos in Providence, where 19.8% of Latinos own their own homes. In Central Falls, close to 88.2% of Latinos are renters.

The dependency of Latinos on rental housing is a key area of vulnerability, particularly in light of the increase in rents, especially in Providence. "The problem is the increase in the cost of housing that has taken place in the last ten years," says a Latino elected

official, “There is an increased demand on housing in part because of the arrival of many Latinos and in part because of the demand placed by the large number of students that attend universities in Providence and can pay high amounts of money for housing.”

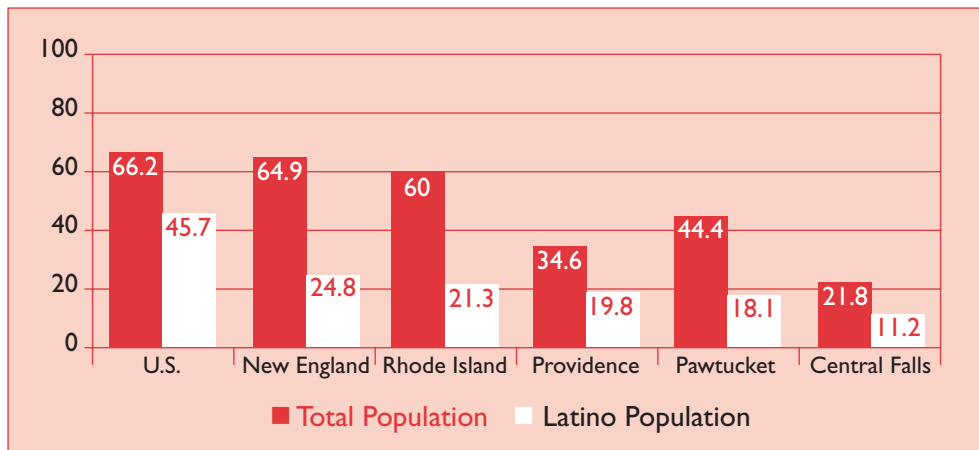
In 2001, Rhode Island Kids Count reported that a family of three living below the federal poverty level in Providence would spend 61% of its income on housing. Recalling that the poverty rate for Latino households is 41% provides a perspective on the numbers of Latinos that have severe problems with housing affordability.

Another way to understand this vulnerability is by looking at the conventional definition of housing affordability, which states that 30% of income is the most a household can pay for housing without hardship, with 50% of income used as a measure of severe housing needs.<sup>110</sup> Considering the fact that most families pay their housing expense first and that other family expenses usually take a back seat to housing costs provides a measure of the impact on nutrition, recreation, and other needs of the crisis of housing affordability for Latinos.

Another perspective on this problem is provided by the incidence of homelessness. In a 27-city survey conducted by the US Conference of Mayors in 2001, Providence had the largest number of homeless families reported. This was an increase of 20% over the previous year. Of these, 25% were Hispanic, 46% were Black and 22% were white (see Figure 20). In spite of the fact that Hispanics were under-represented among the homeless in relationship to their numbers in the populations, homelessness among Latinos in Rhode Island occurred at almost twice the rate as that found in

**Figure 18**

Rate of homeownership of total population and Latino population – US, New England, Rhode Island and selected cities, 2000. (%)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000a

the overall sample of the 27 cities. The percentage of homelessness in 2001 represented an increase of 56% in the rate of homelessness among Latino families. Latinos are often underrepresented among the homeless because a homeless shelter is a last recourse for Latino families. They will often move in with relatives and live with two and three other families in an apartment in order to avoid being without shelter. The United Way's annual report on emergency shelters in 2000, found a smaller percent of Latinos among the shelter population, but that 23% of the homeless female heads of household in the shelters were Latinas.<sup>111</sup> The incidence of homelessness among Latinos, and especially among Latinas, underscores the fact that homelessness is a family problem and a reflection of the level of poverty among Latino families in this city.

## Needs and Recommendations Regarding Housing

Latino leaders and housing providers focused most intensely on the education, advocacy, and enforcement of laws that needs to take place in order to protect access to housing for Latinos. Many acknowledge that many Latinos experience discrimination in obtaining public and Section 8 housing, "Government agencies that deal with public and subsidized housing, ignore the needs of Latinos," expressed a Latino community activist: materials are not linguistically accessible, there are few persons that speak Spanish in the offices and there is no translation provided, and there is no evident effort being made by Latinos to improve access to these programs. Recommendations include active education and advocacy on behalf of persons that qualify for public and Section 8 housing and the development of materials that explain the regulations and the opportunities to Latinos.

Protecting the rights of tenants from discrimination in housing and from landlord abuse is also a critical need. Latinos, explain community leaders and providers, are actively discriminated against in rental housing. Persons discriminated in this way seldom complain to proper authorities, sometimes because they are undocumented

**Table 24**

Cost of rental housing for low income families in areas of high Latino concentration – Rhode Island, 2000.

	Average rent for 2 bedroom apt	% income needed for rent by poverty level family of 3
Providence	5	%
Pawtucket	3	%
Central Falls	4	%

Source: Rhode Island Kids Count, 2001

and fear discovery and other times because they are unaware of their rights as tenants.

Landlord abuse is particularly prevalent against undocumented persons. In both cases, education and advocacy as well as legal assistance to pursue enforcement of housing laws are important.

Homeownership is a goal for many. It represents stability and permanence and it protects families from the vagaries of the rental-housing market. In this area, Latinos also need information about the mechanics of homeownership and assistance in the process of finding and purchasing a home, claim Latino leaders and providers. There is almost no information in Spanish about any of these issues. Linguistically accessible information about the responsibilities of homeownership, such as taxes, utilities, and repairs, is also needed.

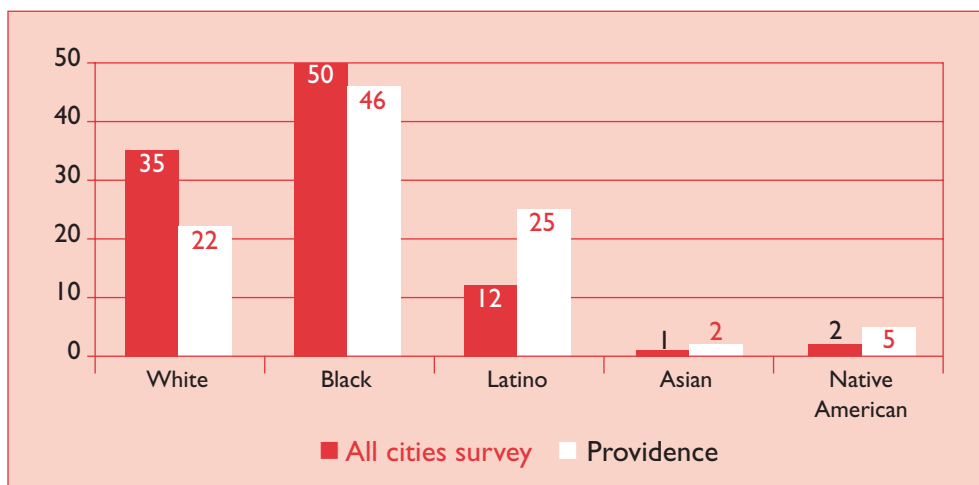
## Health and Social Support

Access to health and supportive services was another concern often mentioned by Latino leaders and providers. The high levels of poverty and the stress of adaptation to a new context are often associated with increases in health problems as well as needs in the area of supportive services. Interviewees who spoke about health and social problems focused more intensely on issues of health and social services and, in particular, on issues of access related to these services.

The barriers to access to services of all types is the focus of the fourth section of this report, where we discuss at length the barriers Latinos experience and the challenges

**Figure 19**

Homelessness by race and ethnicity – Rhode Island, 2000.



Source: Lowe, 2001

that service-providers are undergoing in meeting the needs of Latinos. Therefore, in this report, we focus solely on health and social issues affecting Latinos, and only briefly refer to services.

We begin our discussion with a review of key health indicators. We note that the Rhode Island Department of Health has available the most comprehensive information on Latinos of any department approached. In many ways, they have moved beyond race and ethnicity as a descriptive variable and use it to analyze outcomes for particular groups. As was mentioned in the methodology section of this report, in some cases, data by race or ethnicity are not collected at all and in others are not analyzed in a way that allows for a comprehensive analysis of the Latino situation. This is true of most state administrative data. Specific data on Latinos are not available, for example, from the Department of Human Services, on Latino participation in welfare programs, or from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Nevertheless, health indicators are an internationally recognized measure of quality of life. A review of key indicators provided by the Department of Health provides both good and bad news. The good news is that Latinos seem to be avoiding some risky health behavior in greater proportion than the overall population. Latinos have a lower incidence than the general population of adult smokers, overweight persons, adult drinkers, and young people who drink alcohol or smoke marijuana. Latinos also have a lower incidence of hepatitis B and a similar incidence of low-birthweight babies than the general population. The bad news is that conditions usually associated

## **Table 25**

Needs and recommendations in the area of housing:

### **Need to educate, advocate and enforce laws**

- protecting access to public housing developments
- protecting access to Section 8 housing
- protecting access to rental housing
- protecting the rights of Latinos as tenants in the face of landlord abuse and in cases of evictions

### **Need for linguistically and culturally accessible information and services dealing with**

- the costs of utilities and about rights vis-a-vis utility companies
- availability of rental housing
- purchasing homes
  - Information about home inspections, about obtaining mortgages and credit and about closing costs
- responsibilities of homeownership
  - Information about taxes, housing repair



**Table 26**

Selected health status indicators for all Rhode Island residents and for the Latino Population.

	All Residents	Latinos
<b>Selected diseases</b>		
Incidence of Tuberculosis <sup>a</sup>	6.8	16.9
Incidence of AIDS <sup>b</sup>	111	411
Incidence of hepatitis B <sup>c</sup>	3.0	2.2
Children hospitalized for asthma <sup>d</sup>	2.1	3.9
<b>Maternal and Child Health</b>		
Rate of Infant Mortality <sup>e</sup>	6.4	9.7
Incidence of low birth weight <sup>f</sup>	7.2	7.5
Births to teens 14–18 <sup>g</sup>	30.3	103.8
<b>Behavioral Risk Factors</b>		
Percent 18+ that smokes <sup>h</sup>	22.4	20.3
Percent 18+ that is overweight/obese <sup>b</sup>	33.0 / 9.0	31.0 / 15.0
Percent 18+ exercising more than 20 minutes 3 times a week <sup>b</sup>	45.0	30.4
Percent that had one or more drinks in 2 wks <sup>b</sup>	45.0	26.0
Percent of 10 <sup>th</sup> graders that in the past month		
drank alcoholic beverages	58.0	55.0
used marijuana <sup>i</sup>	27.0	25.0
<b>Other Factors Affecting Health Status</b>		
Prevalence of elevated lead levels in children under 6 <sup>j</sup>	8.7	13
Food Insecurity <sup>k</sup>	21.7 <sup>l</sup>	42

Sources:

- a. Per 100,000 population between 1995 and 1998, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2000a
- b. Per 100,000 population between 1991 and 1996, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c
- c. Per 100,000 population in 1994-1996, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c
- d. Per 1,000 children in 1999, Rhode Island Kids Count, 2001
- e. Per 1,000 live births for 1995-1997 in Buechner, 2000
- f. Percent of infants with birth weights of less than 2500grams 1995-1999. Rhode Island Kids Count, 2001
- g. Per 1000 teens aged 14-18 between 1991 and 1995, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c
- h. In 1996. Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c
- i. In 1995, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c
- j. As percent of children tested for 2000, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2000b. High lead levels at > 10 ug/dl blood lead. Buechner (2000), using 15 ug/dl as the measure for high blood lead levels, reports a significant drop in prevalence between 1994 and 1998 among Latinos bringing the Latino values to 5.2% in 1998.
- k. In 2000, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001b
- l. Figure is for non-Latinos.

with poverty are significantly exacerbated among Latinos. The incidence of tuberculosis is twice as high as that of the general population and the rate of infant mortality, at 9.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, is 50% higher than that found in the general population. In addition, the incidence of AIDS is almost four times as high as that of Rhode Island residents; it also ranks as the fourth-leading cause of death among Latinos. Teen births are also high: more than three times the incidence of the general population.

Other causes of death among Latinos begin to shed light on the levels of stress experienced by the population: homicides are the third cause of death among Latinos and accidents are the fifth. The rates of accidents and homicides are often seen as indicators of social well-being, the fact that they are among the leading causes of death for Latinos is worrisome. Neither ranks among the five highest causes of death for the general population.

**Table 27**

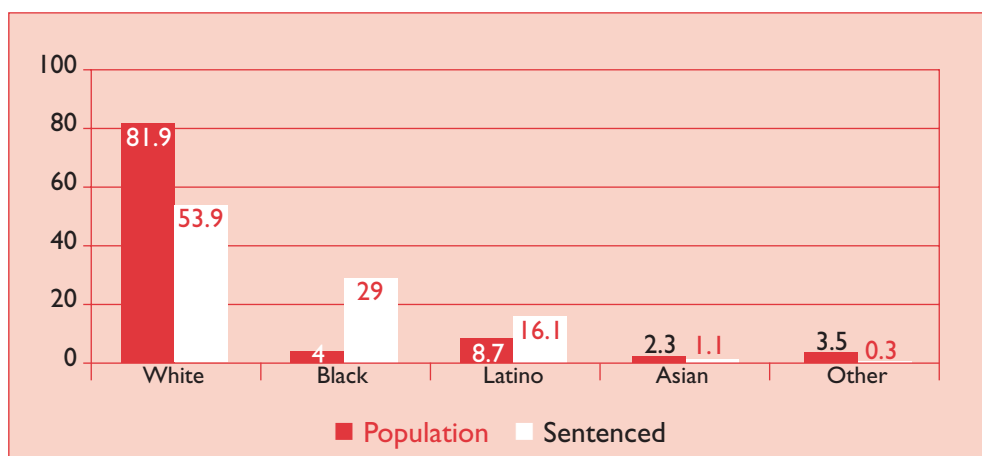
Causes of death – Rhode Island, 1991 to 1993.

State	Latinos in Rhode Island
Heart Disease	Cancer
Cancer	Heart Disease
Stroke	Homicide
Emphysema and other chronic lung diseases	AIDS
Pneumonia and influenza	Unintentional injuries

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c

**Figure 20**

Percent total population and percent incarcerated by race – Rhode Island, 2000.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, 2000

Other indicators of this type include rates of suicide and of incarceration; only the latter where available for this report. Latinos and, especially Blacks, are over-represented in the incarcerated population, when compared with their percentages in the overall population: the percentage of Latinos is almost twice that of their presence in the population while that of Blacks is 7 times larger. Latino males, accounting for 49.3% of the Latino population accounted for 92.7% of those Latinos that are incarcerated.

Providers to Latinos in Rhode Island underscores the problems families are having as a result of the fact they are newcomers and also because of the high incidence of poverty among Latinos. Providers singled out the following issues as areas in which Latinos are experience greatest problems:

The high incidence of AIDS cases among Latinos and the availability of supports necessary for people with AIDS to achieve a good quality of life;

The incidence of family dysfunction ranging from family conflicts derived from the immigration experience to adolescent adjustment issues, drug and alcohol use by family members and family violence;

The incidence of chronic and acute mental health problems;

The incidence of child care and protection cases, many under the custody of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

## Perspectives on Access to Services

One of the strongest statements by providers to Latinos in interviews and by community members in focus groups was that Latinos were under-served by the health and human services systems in Rhode Island. They underscored that there were many and significant barriers to access to services and that there was a significant lack of availability of bilingual and culturally competent services. The fourth section of this report, “A brief look at barriers to services for Latinos,”<sup>112</sup> provides more information about this issue, but we introduce it here with a discussion about the varied different perspectives that exist on this issue among providers in Rhode Island.

The first perspective relies on indicators and concludes that access to services by Latinos is uneven but not severely lacking. The Department of Public Health, for example, provides a series of indicators that measures access to preventive services, primarily. These reveal that Latino access to care is similar to that of the general population in most areas. The sharpest differences occur in access to pre-natal care, source of care other than emergency room, and preventive dental visits (see Table 28).

Information on availability of insurance provides another way to look at access

quantitatively (see Table 29). In Rhode Island, all low-income children are guaranteed health insurance, including undocumented children. The issue is availability of insurance for adults. Latinos have the highest percent of uninsured adults, almost three times that of whites and five percentage points higher than Blacks (see Table 29). They also have the lowest rate of private insurance; this type of insurance is usually provided by employers, but as has been reported previously, Latinos often work for employers who do not provide insurance. Nevertheless, from this information, access to care appears to be a manageable problem.

Another perspective on access is that provided by users. Four focus groups were held in fall 2001 with 40 Latino residents. Issues of access to health and human services were discussed in three of the groups. In general, the most remarkable observation was that participants usually replied to questions by asking questions themselves about specific services, as if hearing about them for the first time. With regard to health care, whether or not they had health insurance, most participants did not seem to be either frequently using health services or to be informed about them. Those who had used them reported positive experiences. With regard to social services, participants seemed to have little personal experience with social services, although two mentioned specific agencies to which they had gone seeking information or services. Latino leaders and providers coincided most with the latter perspective in stressing access to services as a critical problem. From the perspective of the community, access to services appears to be a significant problem.

**Table 28**

Selected access to health care indicators – Rhode Island, various dates. (%)

	<b>All</b>	<b>Latinos</b>
Immunization coverage for children 19 to 35 months <sup>a</sup>	90.4	89.6
Women with delayed pre-natal care	9.3	13.9
Reporting usual source of care as none or emergency room <sup>b</sup>	9.8	14.8
Children screened for lead poisoning <sup>b</sup>	59	63
Women over 40 screened for breast cancer in last 2 years <sup>b</sup>	75.8	78.7
Women over 18+ screened for cervical cancer in last 2 years <sup>b</sup>	82.9	78.2
Persons 2+ with preventive dental visit <sup>c</sup>	72.1	65.4

Sources : (a) DPT(4), Polio(3), MCV(1) in 1999. Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001d; (b) In 1996. Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001c; (c) In 1996, Rhode Island Department of Health, 2001a

## Needs and Recommendations Regarding Health and Social Support

The primary recommendations of service providers, Latino leaders and the members of the Latino community that participated in our focus groups regarding health and social support was the need to improve access to services. Here, we summarize the main observations and recommendations made. These focused on three main areas: information about services, access to health education and access to culturally competent services.

Access to information about eligibility and availability of services is necessary because many newcomers may not be familiar with the specifics of the system of care available in the US or because there may be misconceptions about eligibility (see Table 30). At this point, expressed several providers, word of mouth is the only way Latinos learn about services available or about eligibility. This often contributes to confusion and misinformation.

Providers also stressed the need to develop and distribute preventive health information, on topics such as AIDS, asthma, and diabetes, as well as mental-health care, about which providers perceived there was significant lack of information.

Perhaps the most strongly expressed issue with regard to access was the lack of availability of culturally sensitive and competent services across a gamut of service areas. These included most mental health services, family and children's services including care and protection, family counseling and supportive services. The list also included linguistically accessible services in the offices of the Department of Human Services, in hospitals and in some community health centers, and in the activities of care and protection and foster care involving Latino children of the Department of Children, Youth and Families. In some services, such as hospital emergency rooms, it was common to find translators although these translators were rarely well-trained. Most other services are provided without translation or using children as translators. This is the case even

**Table 29**

Type of health insurance by race and ethnic group for persons 18 to 64 – Rhode Island, 1999.

	<b>Private Health Insurance</b>	<b>Public Medical Assistance of different types</b>	<b>Not insured</b>
White	88.3	1.9	9.9
Black	67	11.6	21.5
Latino	60.2	13.1	26.7

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 1999

Needs and recommendations in the area of health and human services:

Improvement in access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide linguistically accessible information about health and human Services.</li> <li>• Provide linguistically accessible orientation about the organization of health and human services in the US in general and in Rhode Island, in particular.</li> <li>• Provide linguistically accessible information about eligibility to welfare WIC, food stamps, RITE Care, Medicaid and other programs.</li> </ul>
Improvement in accessible health education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education about preventive medical care.</li> <li>• About mental health services and problems.</li> <li>• Education about diseases affecting Latinos disproportionately such as AIDS, asthma, diabetes, drug and alcohol abuse.</li> </ul>
Provide a full gamut of culturally competent services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urgent needs in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AIDS</li> <li>drug and alcohol treatment</li> <li>mental health</li> <li>families and children's services</li> <li>welfare</li> <li>care and protection services, including investigations of child abuse and neglect</li> <li>foster care</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Hiring of bilingual/bicultural staff in hospitals and health centers.</li> <li>• Hiring of bilingual/bicultural staff in state and in private, non-profit social service agencies.</li> <li>• Implementation of outreach and "bridge" programs oriented to Latinos in state services and in private, non-profit services.</li> <li>• Strengthen community-based organizations through financial support and technical assistance directed to the development of a strong service structure at the community level.</li> <li>• Subcontract with Latino community-based human service agencies for the provision of a complement of family support and children's services. Recruitment/training of Latino professionals in the field.</li> <li>• Locate, attract, hire and maintain Latino human service professionals.</li> <li>• Recruit and train entry level human service professionals from the local community.</li> </ul>
Other issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical Insurance/coverage for adults from 19 to 64.</li> </ul>

in care and protection emergencies involving these children or their siblings.

Latino leaders and providers expressed that, in many ways, the state and non-profit service systems in Rhode Island remain “in denial” about the needs of the Latino community. They have been resistant to adding bilingual, bicultural staff or to increasing the cultural competency of monolingual, monocultural staff. They have also been resistant to examining the specifics of Latino needs and demands and to address them programmatically. Those providers interviewed related examples of “bridge” or outreach programs directed at Latinos created by Latino providers in specific agencies and described how those disappeared when the provider changed jobs, signaling that there was no institutional commitment to continuing to provide outreach to this population.

Yet, Latinos recognize the weakness in their own service structure. Latino organizations today are the first point of entry into the service system for many Latinos but they do not have the size or the financial support to provide a full gamut of services. Stabilizing and strengthening community-based organizations through financial support, and technical assistance in developing a strong service structure are key priorities.

### III. Summary of Recommendations

This scan of issues and needs has taken us through four salient issues that frame the Latino experience in Rhode Island and the exploration of the experience of Latinos in the areas of education and jobs, small business development and housing and in health and social support. It is an experience framed by the harshness of poverty and isolation, alleviated only by the spirit and organizational capacity of the people. Although Latinos have been in Rhode Island for more than 20 years, for many in the state they are still invisible; they remain invisible even as they represent one of every three residents of the capital of the state and 14% of the state’s children. Latino leaders expressed that many areas of the system of care in Rhode Island remain “in denial” about the needs of this population, trying to avert if possible the impact that the transformation of the population will make on their current structure and functioning. But it is clear that Latinos are in Rhode Island to stay and that their numbers will make a difference, even to those that refuse to see them at this point.

The problems facing Latinos in Rhode Island are serious and are the problems facing Latino communities elsewhere. But the good news is that their magnitude is a relatively new phenomenon, and not an entrenched and almost accepted part of the life of this particular community. Swift and decisive action can make a world of difference. Latino leaders feel that there is a momentum within the community that, after a long time, is matched by increased attention on the parts of key stakeholders

in the state. They feel that it is a propitious time for proposals and for change.

In that spirit, we summarize here the main recommendations of this report:

**Recommendation 1:** Latinos are a young population, made up largely of young families with children. The small numbers of older adults suggests that the extended networks of older kin may been left behind. Recreating some of the elements of these systems of social support in this new context and connecting the young families to them will be an important source of support for these young families.

**Recommendation 2:** Most Latinos in Rhode Island are newcomers, to the US and to Rhode Island. English language classes and support and guidance in understanding and navigating the new systems are basic areas need to be addressed more fully. Attention also needs to be paid to the language and cultural competence of public services.

**Recommendation 3:** Undocumented immigrants are often the target of abuse by landlords and employers. Advocacy leading to the enforcement of housing and workers' rights laws is critical.

**Recommendation 4:** Students that are undocumented are not eligible for federal financial aid, are currently considered by the state colleges and universities as foreign students and are charged out-of-state tuition and fees, even though they are state residents. Advocacy leading to the designation of these persons as residents for the purposes of tuition would increase Latino access to higher education.

**Recommendation 5:** Latinos have the highest level of poverty of any group on Rhode Island; Latino poverty in Rhode Island also seems to be higher than that of Latinos nationally and regionally. High levels of poverty are associated with increased health problems, low educational achievement and increased vulnerability in almost every area of life. Guarantees of income and food, protection if housing becomes vulnerable, family supportive services, educational support for pre-schoolers and children in school, are critical services that address the worst effects of poverty.

**Recommendation 6:** The level and persistence of poverty among Latinos in Rhode Island warrants increased attention on the part of policymakers, researchers and Latino community leaders because of the impact of poverty on almost every area of life: education, health status, and the capacity for self-sufficiency and stability of families.

**Recommendation 7:** The complexity of factors related to poverty among Latinos requires multifaceted and comprehensive approaches to be effective. Among these are improvements in education, the development of employment and training programs that are integrated to industrial promotion strategies and affirmative action programs, the wide availability of ESL and Adult Basic Education Programs and community economic



development strategies that promote labor market success.

**Recommendation 8:** The Latino organizational environment in Rhode Island favors small cultural and recreational organizations and a strong movement of electoral and political participation. The development of community-based services is somewhat small, yet, the availability of supportive, culturally compatible, easily accessible community-based services is a key factor in supporting Latino families. It should be promoted and financially supported.

**Recommendation 9:** The outcomes of Latino students in the educational system are below those of other groups and below those of Latinos nationally. The educational climate in the schools needs to be improved by increasing the academic expectations, containing the misplacement of Latino children in special education, developing curriculums that are relevant to the lives of students.

**Recommendation 10:** Increase the capacity of experienced teachers Rhode Island schools that have experienced large demographic transformations in their student bodies through professional development and programs that enhance cultural competence.

**Recommendation 11:** The brisk recruitment of culturally competent teaching staff who are also competent in their area of specialty is a priority in the Providence School Department that should be supported and replicated in other school systems.

**Recommendation 12:** Provide Latino counselors in high schools with large Latino enrollments that can focus on drop out prevention.

**Recommendation 13:** Create effective mechanisms for the communication between parents and schools by: (1) addressing language barriers by making all official and unofficial communication between the parents linguistically accessible; (2) providing translators (that are not the children) in parent-teacher encounters; and (3) developing mechanisms for effective discussion with parents of topics such as their responsibilities and rights in the oversight of their child's education.

**Recommendation 14:** Develop links between schools and community-based institutions and organizations with the purpose of supporting the educational endeavor of schools, of children and of families. Possible initiatives include: (1) the development of cultural programs for youth by Latino community-based organizations that will help solidify their connection to the values of Latino culture and (2) the development of after-school programs for children of working parents that emphasize academic and homework support.

**Recommendation 15:** Improve access of Latino students to higher education by: (1) improving the counseling process in the high schools; (2) developing access programs

that will facilitate the process of admissions for students that are first generation college applicants; and (3) increasing the numbers of Latino faculty and staff and Rhode Island colleges and universities that can act as pulls and supports for Latino students.

**Recommendation 16:** Latino outcomes in the labor market are very depressed. Latinos have low incomes and high rates of unemployment and they labor for low wages in the most vulnerable and volatile sectors of the market. In order to aspire to “good jobs,” Latinos have to increase their proficiency in English and their educational attainment. There are long waiting lists for both ESL and ABE classes in Latino-serving organizations. An increase the number of available slots in adult ESL, GED and Adult Basic Education, placing these additional slots in agencies with an established track record of serving Latinos is an important priority. Slots should be open to undocumented Latinos.

**Recommendation 17:** Develop job training programs for work in the growing sectors of the Rhode Island economy. Job training should be linked to jobs and include training for positions beyond entry level. Child care must be made available to women trainees.

**Recommendation 18:** Support advocacy, education and enforcement efforts directed to the protection of workers’ rights.

**Recommendation 19:** Because high levels of Latino poverty are so often associated with labor market disadvantage, research should be conducted that sheds light on the dynamics of Latinos’ low outcomes in the Rhode Island economy and makes specific and regionally relevant recommendations to address the causes of this disadvantage.

**Recommendation 20:** Latino businesses are young and growing. They are an important piece in the economic development of the community. Latino businesses need support to build their capacity to operate successfully. Areas of support include: (1) providing linguistically accessible materials in all areas; (2) developing capacity-building activities that are accessible and relevant to small businesspeople; and (3) addressing topics such as tax responsibilities, accounting and record keeping, regulatory requirements, credit and management skills.

**Recommendation 21:** Support logistically and financially the development of a strong voice for Latino businesses.

**Recommendation 22:** Latinos face a crisis in housing affordability in Rhode Island. They are primarily renters in a market of soaring rental costs, where a poor family spends more than 60% of its income in rent. A step in alleviating the instability of housing might be to remedy the barriers Latinos face in obtaining public and Section 8 housing by taking affirmative steps to inform them of eligibility and of the process for qualifying for this type of housing support.

**Recommendation 23:** Support advocacy and enforcement of fair housing laws being violated in the rental of housing for Latinos.

**Recommendation 24:** Support a process of community-based education around tenants' rights and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 25:** Support educational efforts directed to increase the numbers of homeowners and improve their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in regards to credit, utilities, etc.

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# Access to Services for Latinos in Rhode Island

**LATINO COMMUNITY LEADERS** and providers to Latinos expressed unequivocally that, when it comes to services, Latinos in Rhode Island are underserved and that they face serious barriers to access to services of all types. In fact, the concern about access to services was one of the strongest statements made by these stakeholders during interviews conducted for this study, which is part of a project entitled *Rhode Island Latinos: A Scan of Issues Affecting the Latino Population of Rhode Island* conducted by the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston for The Rhode Island Foundation.

Leaders and providers referred to lack of information and outreach across a range of services: from housing to health, human services. They referred to the dilemma faced by the Latinos seeking services: the lack of availability of an appropriate array of services in Latino community based service organizations<sup>113</sup> and the absence of linguistically accessible and culturally competent services in mainstream<sup>114</sup> programs in Rhode Island. This assessment was underscored by the results of focus groups conducted with members of the Latino community. Focus group members reported to have little personal experience with health and social services, asking many questions about specific services, as if hearing about them for the first time.

In an earlier section of this report, Uriarte, Carrion and Jones report that common health access indicators used by the Department of Health in Rhode Island, did not

reveal as extreme a situation.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, the Department of Health reported that Latinas had higher rates of delayed pre-natal care and lower rates of cervical cancer screening, that Latino children had lower levels of immunization, and that a significantly higher percentage of Latinos reported having no usual source of care or of receiving care in an emergency room compared to the overall population of the state. This study also reported that Latinos were more likely than other groups to be uninsured: 26.7% of Latinos had no health insurance coverage compared to 21.5% of Blacks and 9.9% of whites in Rhode Island.

Disparities in access to health and human services for new immigrants, including Latinos, have been well documented in the academic literature. In recent times, many of these disparities have been found to respond to lack of insurance and economic resources as well as to lack of familiarity with services, insufficient and ineffective outreach strategies, lack of linguistic access, and gaps in cultural competence.<sup>116</sup>

This report describes some of the barriers that Latinos in Rhode Island face in seeking services. Data for this assessment comes from in depth interviews with ten Latino leaders and 28 providers of services to Latinos and four focus groups of ten persons each conducted in collaboration with CHisPA (the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy) in Providence.<sup>117</sup> This report focuses on the service environment for Latinos and the challenges facing organizations serving Latinos and the recommendations Latino leaders and providers to the community have to improve services for Latinos in Rhode Island.

## I. The Service Environment for Latinos

As is true of most people, when Latinos are asked where they go when they need assistance, they reply that “family and friends” are the first source of help and information. The immediate social network is an important source of advice and support, as well as of concrete assistance (such as food, shelter, childcare, and money). This, too, appears to be the case for Latinos in Rhode Island; members of focus groups referred often to the support that family and friends afforded them, particularly in the early days of their stay in Providence.

When needs go beyond the resources of friends and family, a close source of information and support is the Church; the social programs and the networks of acquaintances it sponsors are an important source of information and solace. Newcomers will also reach out to acquaintances at work or in the neighborhood: the Latino shopkeeper or the Latino that all know has been in Rhode Island for a long time and speaks better English. Many are also part or may know a member of the network of groups from

several nationalities that organize cultural events at the community level. Because, although most community-based organizations are really oriented towards cultural activities, they have become a second line of support for persons in need.

The “experienced immigrant,” the shopkeeper or the person they know in the cultural organization, are often the links to information about the more established sources of services in the community. They will tell the persons seeking help about Dorcas Place or Progreso Latino, or take them to CHisPA or the International Institute.

Often, the search for information ends here, although probably not the search for services. For example, agencies such as CHisPA in Providence and Progreso Latino in Central Falls offer a wide array of case management services that provide Latinos with information about public services or services in other non-profits (see Table 1). They provide referrals, often making appointments and arrangements for clients.

But, although these are the agencies most frequently visited by Latinos, the fact is

**Table 1**  
Service provided by Latino community-based organizations in Rhode Island:

Progreso Latino	Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case management assistance with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• immigration,</li> <li>• housing,</li> <li>• public assistance programs,</li> <li>• public utilities,</li> <li>• legal services,</li> <li>• translations</li> <li>• inter-agency referrals</li> <li>• Hasbro day care center;</li> <li>• Youth leadership;</li> <li>• Adult education</li> <li>• ESL</li> <li>• GED in Spanish</li> <li>• adult literacy in Spanish</li> <li>• welfare-to-work job training</li> <li>• Citizenship classes</li> <li>• Community health</li> <li>• Services to the elderly</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Case Management assistance with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• immigration,</li> <li>• housing,</li> <li>• public assistance programs,</li> <li>• public utilities,</li> <li>• legal services,</li> <li>• translations</li> <li>• inter-agency referrals</li> <li>• Health Promoters: community health outreach</li> <li>• Community Development Leadership Initiative</li> <li>• The Bridge School alternative high school</li> <li>• ESL class</li> <li>• Community Information and Referral</li> <li>• Social Justice work on behalf of immigrants</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Sources: Progreso Latino, 2001 and Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy, 2002

that the services offered by both agencies are quite limited. CHisPA, for example, offers some direct services but is largely focused on advocacy issues and policy. Progreso Latino in Central Falls is more oriented to direct services and offers services to youth and the elderly, day care services and educational programs for adults. But if the person seeking help requires any other service they be directed to a non-Latino agency. The case management services at CHisPA or Progreso Latino attempt to link the Latino client to a Latino staff member working in the hospital or the human service agency to which the person might need to go, but this is not always possible. Making the connection between the Latino agency and the mainstream service is often difficult because there are few Latino workers in state agencies or in non-profit human service agencies. There is also “little collaboration between mainstream and Latino programs and organizations,” reports a health provider, echoing the comments of many respondents.

In spite of all the problems, those that find CHisPA or Progreso or the International Institute and are either served by them or guided into the mainstream services are the fortunate ones. Most, as was evident from the participants in the focus groups, simply stay away.

Mainstream state and non-profit institutions in Rhode Island provide a vast array of services to all sectors of the population; interviewees reported that there were no programs within these institutions targeted to specific populations such the Latino community. There are those, like the neighborhood health centers, that have made an effort to be welcoming to Latinos by hiring bilingual staff and assuring the presence of translators. But most providers reported that, in general, “the service infrastructure lacks bilingual linguistic capacity to serve non-English speaking clients” says Luisa Murillo, executive director of CHisPA, “it lacks culturally competent staff to serve Latino clients.”<sup>118</sup> Non-English speaking Latinos find it difficult to navigate the systems, understand instructions and comply with rules, often generating impatience and hostility from workers, interviewees reported. In general, most felt that the interaction of Latinos with these systems is, in itself, a source of stress and unease. “These are the services that people need—in housing, in health and in human services—but cultural sensitivity is an issue,” says another Latino leader.

The results are that, often, Latinos “get lost” in these systems. They become confused and do not follow through when they do not find the linguistic support they need to get the appropriate service.

## Two Worlds

Latinos in Rhode Island, and most particularly those less proficient in English, navigate

between two different systems of service delivery, two different worlds. One is made up of a small number of organizations that deliver services geared specifically to the growing Latino population. They serve them in Spanish or English, depending on their needs, and the fact that there are persons similar to the clients in background and values makes for ease and comfort. They serve them as they walk in the door, very few questions asked, in a highly personal style that is attuned with the culture. Latino agencies help the Latino population understand American processes and explain what persons need to do to receive the services they need, quelling fears language barriers often spawn. The growing Latino population puts increasing demands on Latino organizations to widen their scope of services but limited financial and staff resources has meant that the services offered in Latino agencies are very limited in scope and do not represent a comprehensive array of services. The limitations of Latino agencies make it impossible for Latinos to rely solely on their services.

The other world is a loose network of agencies and programs serving the general population and that operate under rules that are mostly unfamiliar to Latino newcomers. These institutions offer valuable services that Latinos organizations cannot match. They have a broad scope of services, larger and more specialized staffs and greater financial resources to develop programs and to serve large numbers of persons.

The perspective from Latino leaders and providers is that quality of service in general is good, but that it is just out of the reach of many Latinos, particularly those who do not speak English. Barriers of language and culture are important stumbling blocks in the use of these services by Latinos. These institutions have insufficient qualified bilingual staff and those who are bilingual are not in key positions needed in service areas. Although some may have translators, Latino community leaders and providers raised concerns about the use of untrained translators or the use of children to translate for parents. Gaps in cultural knowledge in areas that affect service delivery were also identified as a problem. There is a “one size fit all” perspective in regards to human services that prevents consideration of more flexible approaches to new populations.<sup>119</sup>

In general, providers and leaders felt that there was a feeling of “benign neglect” on the part of mainstream agencies. Few public agencies or non-profits make efforts to outreach to Latinos. Although they have existed in the past, at this point there are no programs within public agencies or non-profits that concentrate linguistically accessible services as a way to provide an entry point for Latinos into mainstream agencies. There are few “hooks” than can easily bring Latinos to these agencies and there are few persons that speak their language that will retain them in the process of service delivery.

Collaboration. In this kind of environment, an important question is the quality of the collaboration between these two worlds. Providers report that although there

has been some improvement since the Census reported the high growth of the Latino community, collaboration between the Latino agencies and the state and non-profit agencies is often lacking. Providers to Latinos report that there is resistance on the part of mainstream state agencies and non-profits to examine the match between Latino needs and the services they provide. “They are not open to be educated about the Latino community,” expressed a Latino elected official. “They lack knowledge about the community, yet they think they know what is best for this community,” echoed a health provider. Providers point out that collaboration has also been affected by the fact that Latinos often hold back from interacting with established services and that Latino service agencies have at times been unstable. But the general sense is that mainstream agencies are not actively seeking to address the complex needs of a large, poor, immigrant population, although in the last three years there has been some slight improvement.

## 2. Barriers to Services

Latino leaders and providers to Latinos commented on the barriers facing Latinos as they sought services. We inquired about barriers to access based on language and culture, geography, economic resources, and availability of services. The findings are that both the mainstream services and the services offered by Latino organizations present barriers, although completely different ones.

Linguistic and cultural barriers were the most often mentioned in relationship to the state and mainstream private non-profit services. Interviewees reported that basic information about services—whether housing, job training, health care or human services—is generally not available in Spanish and there was an urgent need expressed for linguistically accessible information about program characteristics, availability and eligibility across all service areas.<sup>120</sup> Interviewees expressed that these institutions have insufficient qualified bilingual staff and that, often, those who are bilingual are not in positions needed in service areas. Although many institutions have translators, Latino community leaders and providers raised concerns about the lack of consistent availability of trained translators in public services and in hospitals. There were consistent reports of the use of non-trained personnel (many referred to stories of cleaning personnel used for health translations) and the use of children as translators for their parents. In some cases, children were used as translators for parents’ health problems and even as translators in care and protection cases.<sup>121</sup>

Problems related to the cultural competence of public service and mainstream non-profit staffs, even in areas relevant to their services, were other often mentioned barriers. Cultural competence encompasses cognitive, affective and skills dimensions that include self-awareness and awareness of differences, knowledge about the other,



commitment to a practice that adapts to the needs of others, and the practical skills of working professionally across cultures.<sup>122</sup> Leaders and providers have expressed that there are serious gaps of knowledge about Latino culture and about the impact of the process of immigrant adaptation on the Latino population among service providers.

Geography was seen as a barrier to access to services in Latino agencies. The broadest array of services is offered in Central Falls, a ways away from the largest concentration of the Latino population in Providence. There are areas of the state that are completely out the reach of Latino agencies due to lack of funding. “We know there are these needs in other areas,” says the executive director of a Latino program, “but the resources are just not there to allow us to respond to them.”

Economic barriers are common in the area of health care. Although all children are insured, Latinos still have the highest percentage of non-insured persons (26.7%) of any racial/ethnic group in the state. This presents a significant barrier to access of to health care for the Latino population. At this time, there is not a comprehensive and accessible array of services for the Latino population. Although the state and the mainstream private non-profits have a full complement of services available, these are not fully accessible to Latinos for linguistic, cultural and economic reasons, as has been discussed above. Those services that are most accessible are seriously limited in their offerings and present great geographic barriers.

### 3. Challenges and Recommendations

Latino service organizations and state and private nonprofit services face significant challenges as they attempt to improve the access and the quality of services for Latinos in Rhode Island. Latino leaders and providers to Latinos discussed their perspective on what these challenges were and how they could be addressed. For state agencies and mainstream non-profit sector, the greatest task is to come to terms with the meaning of the large population change that has taken place in Rhode Island, most particularly in Providence. “The institutions fail to understand that Rhode Island has undergone a demographic shift—it is a different population,” said Victor Capellán.<sup>123</sup> This is echoed by other Latino leaders when they expressed that “neither migration nor the Latino community will disappear, they are in Rhode Island to stay.” The Latino community did not grow overnight and it has always been a poor, working community full of children and newcomers. Most of the service systems in the city and the state are perceived as unresponsive, creating an environment where the population has little expectation of established agencies and also little trust, according to Latino leaders interviewed. Earning the trust of the community through consistent and affirmative initiatives that reach out to Latinos in a welcoming fashion is simple and

**Table 3**

Barriers access to services: state and mainstream non-profit services and Latino community-based organizations:

	State and Mainstream Non-profit services	Latino Community- Based Organizations
<b>Linguistic/ Cultural Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about programs is not usually available in Spanish</li> <li>• Information about eligibility for benefits such as welfare, food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, public and Section 8 housing is not usually available in Spanish</li> <li>• Information about rights as recipients of public services is not usually available in Spanish</li> <li>• Inconsistent availability of trained translators in public services, hospitals, courts, and in non-profit services</li> <li>• Significant lack of understanding of Latino culture, including aspects of the culture pertinent to effective service delivery</li> <li>• Significant lack of Latino staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic barriers for speakers of native languages such as Mayan.</li> </ul>
<b>Geographic Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and non-profit services have geographic coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agencies are located in Providence and Central Falls only.</li> <li>• For the widest array of direct services, persons must travel to Central Falls.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public or private insurance required for health services. Universal insurance for children available but for adults.</li> <li>• Fees required in some non-profits and public services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No major economic barriers</li> </ul>



important start.

Understanding and responding to community needs, said those interviewed, is another critical challenge. Agencies need to learn more about this community and its needs and formulate strategies to address them. Addressing cultural barriers is most important since this keeps the agencies isolated from this constituency. Aggressive outreach, programs that attract and retain Latinos to their services and appropriate translation services are some mechanisms.

Serving a new population means change: this is a basic element of service delivery. Because the new population is different in regards to culture and language, cultural competence is at the center of the transformation that needs to take place. Re-training current staff and assuring language competence within the agency are important first steps, express Latino leaders and providers to Latinos in Rhode Island. Hiring bilingual, bicultural staff creates an environment of acceptance of diversity within organizations,

**Table 3 (continued)**

Barriers access to services: state and mainstream non-profit services and Latino community-based organizations:

<b>Service Availability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some services available but not accessible</li> <li>• Special problems in the area of health, mental health, immigration, family supports, children's services, services for people with HIV/AIDS, job training, adult basic education.</li> <li>• Growing demand for night and weekend services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited breadth of services due to lack of staff and financial resources</li> <li>• Waiting lists; services not sufficient for demand</li> </ul>
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**Table 4**

Improving Services to Latinos: Institutional Challenges

<b>State and Mainstream Non-profit services</b>	<b>Latino Community-Based Organizations</b>
Earn community's trust	Increase service resources
Meet community needs	Develop the organizational systems and practices
Increase bilingual, bicultural and culturally competent staff	Manage demand for services

a necessary step to provide a culturally sensitive service.

If the challenge for mainstream agencies is complex, so is the task of Latino community-based service organizations. In many ways, what is required is a process of institutional and organizational development that will strengthen the capacity of current service agencies and develop new ones in other areas of the state and addressing more and different needs. Availability of funding for growth and expansion that meets the challenge of the growth of the population was the most often mentioned issue by Latino leaders and providers. The development of strategies that succeed in bringing additional resources to the community is an urgent task.

Alongside strategies for funding must be strategies for organizational development. Improvements in strategic and organizational planning, in management, in personnel development, in public relations, and even in the work of Boards of Directors have all been mentioned as necessary. Clarity in mission and phased, strategic growth were also seen as critical to the agencies sustainability. The challenge is for Latino organizations to make a qualitative leap in capacity so that they can strengthen their credibility to handle more clients, more programs and more funding.

Managing the tremendous increase in the demand for services is a critical challenge for both Latino agencies and mainstream institutions. Increased collaboration between Latino agencies, between agencies and other Latino organizations and between Latino agencies and other service providers are critical elements of the expansion of service delivery, according to Latino leaders and providers.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the problems with access to services experienced by Latinos appears to be a manageable one when one examines it from the perspective of indicators, focus group discussions and interviews with Latino leaders suggest that access to services is a serious problem for the community. Both pointed to lack of available services at the community level and the linguistic and cultural barriers present in the established service system as important barriers to services for Latinos.

A closer look at the service environment for Latinos reveals that the first line of services consists of informal community networks that link into a more formal but small support system of church and community based services. Programs such as Progreso Latino, CHisPA, the International Institute, programs in churches and other community based organizations spend a significant amount of time carrying out basic orientation and referral, case management and other basic services. The established service system—made up of state agencies and mainstream private non-profit

organizations—offers a broad scope of services and in general, the quality of these services is perceived as good by Latinos but it is largely out of the reach of many Latinos, particularly those that do not speak English. Although in the last few years there has been some improvement, there appears to be very little collaboration between the Latino oriented community-based services and the established service system in the Rhode Island.

Barriers of language and culture are important stumbling blocks in the use of these mainstream services by Latinos. Latino leaders, providers to Latinos and potential service users expressed that these barriers are most evident in:

The lack of information about programs available in Spanish;

The inconsistent availability of trained translators in public services, hospitals, courts, and in non-profit services. There is a practice of use of untrained staff and even children as translators;

The significant lack of understanding of Latino culture, including aspects of the culture pertinent to effective service delivery;

The very sparse presence of Latino staff in mainstream agencies. On their part, the Latino community based organizations present barriers of geography and availability of services. Latino service organizations are located in Central Falls and Providence only. For the widest array of direct services, persons must travel to Central Falls, where Progreso Latino offers services that include childcare, programs for youth and the elderly and English language and ABE classes. In spite of these offerings, there is a limited breadth of services available because of lack of financial resources and staff. Services in Latino agencies are not sufficient for the demand presented by Latinos. There are waiting lists and a growing unmet demand for night and weekend services;

The lack of a full array of accessible services provided by Latino community based agencies and the linguistic and cultural barriers to service present in the mainstream agency together result in severe under-service to Latinos across the range of human services.

Improving access to services to Latinos will require: (1) a thorough assessment of the level of service use and the specific problems Latinos face in accessing the different types of services; (2) trained translators in public services and in health and human services, mandated through either legislation or by changes in administrative practice; (3) the development of cultural competence in public services and in the delivery of services by private non-profit agencies; (4) the hiring of Latino staff in public services

and in private non-profit agencies; and (5) the development of culturally and linguistically accessible services at the community level by:

Strengthening the organizational and service capacity of Latino community based agencies and other organizations with a track record of serving Latinos effectively;

Leveraging state contracts and private funding for the development of an appropriate range of services, including case management services, adult education and job training, family support and counseling, youth recreational and academic support programs, and health prevention programs.

Supporting the development of the leadership of staff and boards of directors of Latino community based organizations as well as of Latino service professionals.

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## Appendix I

### Description of the Current Population Sample (CPS) Used in this Study

In order to use the most current information, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' continuing program, the *Current Population Survey*, was used where data from the 2000 Decennial Census had not been released. The *CPS Annual Demographic Supplement*, conducted each March, includes data of interest to this study. Because data from different sources is used, this appendix attempts to compare the information in the different sources.

The *Current Population Survey* is targeted only on the civilian, non-institutional population aged 16 and over. The primary purpose is the measurement of employment statistics, and for the March Supplement, estimation of other labor force variables. Compared to the Census, the CPS misses people in institutions, group quarters, hospitals, etc., and persons without stable homes. The CPS is also geographically stratified sample, which may lead to inaccuracies where the population is heterogeneous across location.<sup>124</sup> Though not in the target labor force population, children in households are counted. Approximately 50,000 people are in the sample nationwide, and in March 2000, 1289 in Rhode Island<sup>125</sup> Latinos are oversampled in the March Supplement to improve the accuracy of their labor force estimates<sup>126</sup>.

To have a sufficiently large sample for the purposes of this study, a three-year pooled sample was constructed from 1999, 2000, and 2001 public microdata files. In Rhode Island, 1544 households and 3772 persons are in the pooled sample.<sup>127</sup> Estimates of population characteristics are made using the household or person "March Supplement Weight" ('hsup\_wt' or 'marsupwt'). The estimates should approximate the conditions in March 2000 or the income earned in 1999. No attempt was made to eliminate respondents appearing in consecutive years, so statistical tests using the data in this report may not be reliable.

The following tables compare the information from the three-year pooled sample to the April 2000 Census where data from both is available—age, race and ethnicity. Assuming that the Census closely approximates true population conditions, the pooled sample estimates are likely to be accurate to the extent that they match Census enumerations.

The race and ethnicity breakdown (excluding those persons listed as of "Some other race" and "Two or more races" which appear only in the 2000 Census) is as follows:

Race/Ethnicity	Census 2000		Pooled 1999, 2000, 2001 CPS			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Sum of Weights	Weighted Percent
Total	1,019,092*	100.0%*	3,772	100.0%	2,810,270.28	100.0%
Latino	90,820	8.9%	340	9.0%	153,558.54	5.5%
White	858,433	84.2%	3,177	84.2%	2,439,471.58	86.8%
Black	41,922	4.1%	141	3.7%	121,279.64	4.3%
Am. Indian/ Alaskan Nat	4,181	0.4%	19	0.5%	81,637.77	2.9%
Asian and Pac. Is	23,736	2.3%	95	2.5%	14,322.75	0.5%

\* not all persons are included in total, categories with no equivalent in the CPS excluded.

For a sample size of 3772, the Census percents generate a sample statistically the same as the sample count (  $c^2 = 2.72$ ,  $p = 0.61$  ) but the weighted percent is significantly different from the population figures (  $c^2 = 679$ ,  $p = 0$  ).

The Latino populations break down into national groups as follows:

For the sample size of 340, both the sample percent (  $c^2 = 120$ ,  $p = 4.9e-25$  ) and the weighted percent (  $c^2 = 150$ ,  $p = 2.3e-31$  ) are different from the population percent at a statistically significant level. Of particular note is the reversed proportions of Central and South American and Other (including Dominicans). Because there is no Dominican Republic category in the CPS, it may be that many Dominicans are included in the catch-all 'Central and South American' rather than 'Other Spanish' category.

The age distributions for the total and Latino population (percents only) are shown below:

Nationality	Census 2000		Pooled 1999, 2000, 2001 CPS			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Sum of Weights	Weighted Percent
Total Latinos	90,820	100.0%	340	100.0%	153,558.54	100.0%
Mexican	5,881	6.5%	15	4.4%	6,552.2	4.3%
Puerto Rican	25,422	28.0%	107	31.5%	42,551.39	27.7%
Cuban	1,128	1.2%	8	2.4%	2,830.81	1.8%
South / Central American	19,986	22.0%	146	42.9%	73,068.57	47.6%
Other/Dominican	38,403	42.3%	63	18.5%	28,555.57	18.6%

For a 340 person sample size, the age distribution is more similar for Latinos than was the Nationality breakdown (  $c^2 = 22.7$ ,  $p = 0.16$  ).

The purpose of using these data is to examine the relative conditions faced by Latinos in the state of Rhode Island, compared to the past, compared to their non-Hispanic neighbors, and compared to the Nation. The data obtained from the *Current Population Survey* has limitations, and is not appropriate for use in statistical tests for significant difference. However, the patterns and magnitudes are similar enough for us to discern where there are practical differences. We have no reason to suspect that the qualitative conditions revealed in this report are very different from those actually experienced by the population.

## Appendix 2: Focus Group Methodology

Juan Carlos Gorlier

### Selection of the Participants

Participants were pre-selected from lists prepared by CHisPA staff as part of an extended Outreach Program centered on health issues and needs among Latinos/as; further screening was based on gender, age, country of origin, and place of residence. A Recruitment Protocol was used by recruiters when making the initial contact with prospective participants. In addition to explaining the specifics of the project, including payment and the relevance of the study for the Latino community, the protocol required basic information on the prospective participant. Once a list of potential group participants was in place, researchers contacted them for the purpose of further screening.

### Focus Group Topics

The groups were focused around topics in the following thematic areas: Cultural activities/entertainment; Economic development / work; Education; Health; Housing; Immigration; Leadership; Social Services.

### Composition of the Groups

**Group 1:** 6 women (2 from Colombia, 2 from the Dominican Republic, and 2 from Puerto Rico), and 4 men (1 from Bolivia, 1 from Colombia, 1 from Guatemala, and one from Venezuela). Participants' ages ranged between 26 and 54 years old. 7 participants were Providence residents, and 3 were from Central Falls.

**Group 2:** 5 women (1 from Colombia, 1 from Guatemala, 1 from Honduras, and 2 from Puerto Rico), and 5 men (1 from Guatemala, 2 from the Dominican Republic, and 2 from Mexico). Participants' ages ranged between 21 and 56 years old. 8 participants were Providence residents, 1 was from Central Falls, and another one from Pawtucket.

**Group 3:** 4 women (2 from Colombia, and 2 from the Dominican Republic), and 2



men (1 from Guatemala, and 1 from Puerto Rico). Participants' ages ranged between 37 and 48 years old. 4 participants were Providence residents, 1 was from Central Falls, and another one from Pawtucket.

**Group 4:** 3 women (1 from Guatemala, 1 from Honduras and 1 from the Dominican Republic), and 6 men (1 from Puerto Rico, 3 from Guatemala, and 1 from the Dominican Republic). Participants' ages ranged between 20 and 47 years old. All participants were Providence residents.

### Running the Groups

All the groups were coordinated by a moderator and an assistant, average number of participants around 9 per group. In all cases, before the group activity, participants and interviewers shared a meal. All groups were held in Spanish. Group work lasted an average of 120 minutes.

## Appendix 3: Persons Interviewed for this study

Hon. Luis Aponte, Providence City Council

Alido Baldera, Project HOPE

Carolina Bernal, Institute for Labor Studies

Mario Bueno, Progreso Latino

Vania Brown-Small, Office of Minority Health, Rhode Island Department of Health

Verouska Capellán, Southside Broadstreet Economic Development Corporation

Victor Capellán, Providence School Department

Father, Hugo Carmona, Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Victor Cuenca, Director, La Semana

Cristiana Delossantos, Rhode Island Hospital

Cynthia García Coll, Brown University

Juan García, Community organizer

Maribel García, CHisPA

Jose González, Providence School Department

Judge Roberto González

Juana Horton, Director, Hispanic American Chamber of Commerce

Linda Katz, The Poverty Institute, Rhode Island College

Carl Krueger, Attorney, International Institute

Diana Lam, Superintendent, Providence School Department

Jay Lindgren, Director, Department of Children, Youth and Families

Miguel Luna, Department of Human Services

Marta V. Martínez, Rhode Island Historical Society

Patricia Martínez, Providence School Department

Tony Méndez, Radio WPMZ (Poder 1110)

Luisa Murillo, Executive Director, CHisPA  
Olga Noguera, Department of Human Services  
Frances Parra, Rhode Island Housing  
Luis Peralta, Progreso Latino  
Lydia Pérez, Puertorriqueños Unidos  
Vidal Pérez, Brown University  
Janet Pichardo, Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation  
Tomas Ramírez, Chair of Board of Directors, Progreso Latino  
Pablo Rodriguez, M.D., Director, Women's Care, Inc  
Elvys Ruiz, Quisqueya en Accion  
William Shuey, International Institute  
Bruno Sukys, International Institute  
Ylonka Szabo, International Institute  
Hon. Anastasia Williams, Rhode Island House of Representatives

## Footnotes

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- 1 The term “Asian” is used here to identify the aggregate of persons of Asian descent.
- 2 The term “Latino” is used here to identify persons of Latin American descent (including Puerto Ricans) in the aggregate. It is a term akin to “Hispanic” that also aggregates persons from the many Latin American nationalities.
- 3 US Census 2000 (a). Some of this decrease may be due to changes how the “race” variable was measured in the 2000 US Census, which, for the first time, included the possibility for identifying as of “more than one race.” There were 20,816 persons that identified themselves in that way in Rhode Island. Some of these persons may have identified themselves as “white” in previous censuses.
- 4 In fact, in 1999, the US Bureau of the Census estimated that Rhode Island would have a population loss of 1.3%. See <http://www.dlt.state.ri.us/lmi/TrendsInRI%20Economy/popCESLAUS.htm>
- 5 Rivera, 1991; p 5
- 6 US Bureau of the Census 1990(a) and 2000(a)
- 7 CPS data used was generated by Charles Jones from the March Current Population Survey public microdata for 1999, 2000, and 2001. (US Bureau of the Census 2000b: March 1999 and March 2000 files; and Census Bureau 2001a). A three year combined sample is constructed from all persons in households located in Rhode Island weighted by the “March Supplement Weight” (variable: marsupwt) to estimate population characteristics.
- 8 US Bureau of the Census, 2000(a)
- 9 Immigration and Naturalization Service, Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. 1997 and 1998. [http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/imm98excel/Table\\_17.xls](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/imm98excel/Table_17.xls).
- 10 See, for example, Cruz, 1998 and Uriarte, 1993, Piore, 1973.
- 11 Data is from a three-year pooled sample of the Current Population Survey which includes 340 Latinos.
- 12 Since it is a pooled sample from three years of surveys, “last year” may mean 1998, 1999 or 2000.
- 13 US Bureau of the Census, 2000 (a).
- 14 Interviewed October 2001.
- 15 US Bureau of the Census, 1983 and 2000 (a).
- 16 Sánchez-Korrol, 1983.
- 17 Carpenter and Conley, 1974(a) and (b).
- 18 Ibid., 1974 (a).
- 19 Julio Casiano. Personal Interview, 1996.
- 20 US Commission on Civil Rights, 1996.
- 21 Katz, et al. Oral history interviews, 1998.
- 22 Baez Evertz, 1994.
- 23 Ferguson, 1996 and Meltzer, 1982.
- 24 Brooks, Goris, Bguyen Le, Merrow. 1998.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Josefina Rosario. Personal Interview, 1991.
- 27 Alper, Drury, Torpey. Oral history interviews 1998.

- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Jay Gutiarri. Personal Interview, 1997.
- 30 Bernardo Chamorro, Personal Interview, 1998.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Buckman, 2001
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Castillo, et al., 1998 and Martínez, (unpublished).
- 35 Anonymous interview.
- 36 Olga Noguera. Personal Interview, 2000. Toledo Morales, Astrid. Personal Interview, 1997.
- 37 Cockcroft. 1995.
- 38 Johnson, 1938.
- 39 Latino is a term that aggregates persons of Latin American background from countries where Spanish is spoken.
- 40 Census Bureau, 2002 (Undercount Estimates).
- 41 Data was generated by Charles Jones from the March Current Population Survey public micro data for 1999, 2000, and 2001. (Census Bureau 2000b: March 1999 and March 2000 files; and Census Bureau 2001). These were weighted by the “March Supplement Weight” (variable: marsupwt for persons in household and variable hsup\_wt for households).
- 42 A sample description and comparisons to available 2000 US Census data appears in Appendix 1.
- 43 See Minority health facts: Hispanics/Latinos in Rhode Island at [www.healthri.org/chic/minority/mhf\\_lat.htm](http://www.healthri.org/chic/minority/mhf_lat.htm) and Latino/Hispanic Culture & Health at [www.healthri.org/chic/minority/lat\\_cul.htm](http://www.healthri.org/chic/minority/lat_cul.htm)
- 44 Interview with Nancy Katz, 10/19/2001.
- 45 A description of the participants and the methods used in conducting the focus groups appears in Appendix 2.
- 46 A list of those interviewed appears in Appendix 3.
- 47 Pablo Rodriguez, interviewed 9/26/2001.
- 48 US Bureau of the Census 2000(a).
- 49 The numbers of Mexicans sampled by the CPS in Rhode Island were too small to provide an accurate description of the population with any level of detail and therefore are only included in the figures for “all Latinos.”
- 50 Bureau of the Census 2001(a) and 2000(b).
- 51 See Uriarte and Jones, 2001 and Martinez, 2001.
- 52 Puerto Ricans are US citizens by birth.
- 53 This category aggregates many national groups; the most salient for Rhode Island are the Colombians and the Guatemalans.
- 54 Dominicans are the main group in this category since Mexicans and Cubans are listed separately. Mexicans and Cubans were not included in this analysis because their representation in the Current Population Survey was very small and therefore the specific data was not deemed to be reliable. They are included in all analyses that are made about the Latino population in general.
- 55 See, among many, Morales and Bonilla, 1993; Oboler, 1995; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001;

Rodriguez, 2000.

56 Focus group #4, 11/6/01.

57 Focus group #2, 9/25/2001.

58 This evidence, which will be reported in other sections of this report, includes employment data, interview and focus group data.

59 Roberto Gonzalez, interviewed 9/19/2001.

60 Pablo Rodriguez, interviewed 9/26/2001.

61 Carl Krueger, interviewed 10/15/2001.

62 These are estimates offered by providers working directly with immigrants at CHisPA and the International Institute, both in Providence.

63 Carnoy, Daley and Hinojosa Ojeda, 1993.

64 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000.

65 Poverty rates for Rhode Island Latinos of all ages are higher than those for Latino persons in Massachusetts, which stands at 34.6%.

66 US Bureau of the Census, 2000a and Rhode Island Kids Count, 2001b.

67 Haig Freidman, Albelda, Werby and Kahan, 2001.

68 A special run was requested from the Rhode Island Department of Health that described the characteristics of Latino households determined to be “food insecure.” See Rhode Island Department of Health, 2002.

69 See Melendez, 1994 for a succinct analysis of the research on Latino poverty conducted for the Persistent Poverty Project of The Boston Foundation.

70 Melendez, 1994, p 5.

71 Interviews with Carolina Bernal (10/05/01) and Mario Bueno (10/19/01).

72 US Bureau of the Census 2001 (a) and 2000 (b).

73 Meléndez, 1994 p 21.

74 See Marta Martinez, 2001; Bergantz, Kim, Lelyveld, Lucero, Stewart and Tierney, nd; Castagna, 1986; Michaelson, 1986; and interview with Marta Martinez,

75 Martinez, 2001.

76 In Bergantz, Kim, Lelyveld, Lucero, Stewart and Tierney, n.d, p 28.

77 For one account of the barriers faced in developing community organizations see Bergantz, Kim, Lelyveld, Lucero, Stewart and Tierney, n.d. and for an analysis of the challenges facing the Latino agencies in the mid-eighties see Castagna, 1986 and Michaelson, 1986.

78 Interviews with Luisa Murillo (9/21/01), Victor Capellán (9/26/01) and Patricia Martinez (9/24/01).

79 Interviewed on 9/26/01.

80 Interviewed on 9/ 21/01.

81 On September 16, 1997. Quoted in Bergantz, Kim, Lelyveld, Lucero, Stewart and Tierney, n.d. p 35.

82 For an discussion of the inter-ethnic dynamics of this race see, Kurland, 2001.

83 Kurland, 2001, Bergantz, Kim, Lelyveld, Lucero, Stewart and Tierney, n.d. p 35.

84 Interviewed 9/26/01.

85 Interviewed 9/26/01.

86 Interviewed 9/26/2001.

87 Interviewed 10/03/2001.

- 88 Rhode Island Department of Education, 2000a.
- 89 New England and New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.
- 90 State and districts differ in the methodology used to calculate drop out rates. In a personal communication, Dr. Van A Vidana of the Rhode Island Department of Education reported that the state used the following method: For each academic year, the department “collects the fall enrollments at the beginning of the year (November 1st) and the number of dropouts at the end of the year (June 30th) for grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 at each high school in the state. The probability that a student is retained at each grade is calculated as  $1 - \# \text{ dropout} / \# \text{ fall enrollment}$ . We calculate this number for each of the 4 grades and multiply them to get a ratio. This ratio is the probability of a student being retained in grades 9 to 12. This fraction or ratio when multiplied by 100 gives the graduation rate for each school.  $100 - \text{graduation rate}$  is the dropout rate. The same process is used at the district and state level aggregations.”
- 91 Van A. Vidana, email communication, 1/30/2002.
- 92 Interviewed on 10/02/2001.
- 93 Interview with Pablo Rodriguez, 9/26/2001.
- 94 The Providence Blueprint for Education and The Providence Plan, nd, p 8.
- 95 Interviewed on 10/02/2001.
- 96 Interviewed on 10/31/2001.
- 97 Interviewed on 10/26/2001.
- 98 Interviewed 10/02/2001.
- 99 The Providence Blueprint for Education and The Providence Plan,
- 100 Interviewed 10/26/2001.
- 101 Rhode Island Office of Higher Education, 2001b p 2
- 102 Interviewed on 10/19/2001.
- 103 Department of Administration, Equal Opportunity Office, 2001.
- 104 Interviewed on 10/26/2001.
- 105 interview with Carolina Bernal ( 10/05/2001) and William Shuey (10/26/2001).
- 106 Martinez, 2002.
- 107 US Bureau of the Census, 2001c.
- 108 Interview with Janet Pichardo reported in Anthony, Auth, Cisneros, Niño-Murcia, Ketten and Szabo, 2000.
- 109 See Anthony, Auth, Cisneros, Niño-Murcia, Ketten and Szabo, 2000 for a discussion of the effect on Latino businesses of the Enterprise Zone activities in the Broad Street area and of the state Enterprise Community in the Latino business area of Central Falls.
- 110 Stone, Werby and Haig-Freidman, 2001.
- 111 United Way, RI Emergency Shelter Annual Report, 2000.
- 112 Uriarte and Carithers, 2002.
- 113 The term Latino community based services or Latino services refer to those services and organizations directed to the Latino community, with Latino staff and Latino leadership.
- 114 The term mainstream program refers to the network on state and non-profit agencies, services and programs geared to the general population.
- 115 See data from the Department of Health reported in Uriarte, Carrion and Jones 2002.
- 116 See Upshur et al, 1998; Delgado, 1997; Flack, et al, 1995; Molina and Aguirre-Molina, 1994; D’Avanzo, 1992.

117 For a description of the process of selection of these interviewees and the method used to carry out the focus groups see Uriarte, Carrion and Jones 2002.

118 Interviewed on 9/21/2001.

119 Interview with Vidal Perez, 10/02/2001.

120 See section by Uriarte, Carrion and Jones 2002.

121 See section by Uriarte, Carrion and Jones 2002.

122 Orlandi, 1992. See also Green, 1982.

123 Interviewed 9/26/2001.

124 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000b.

125 US Bureau of the Census, 2000b.

126 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000b.

127 US Bureau of the Census, 2000b, 2001a.

## Biographies

Natalie Carithers is a doctoral student in the Public Policy Ph.D. Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

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# RHODE ISLAND LATINOS

A Scan of Issues Affecting the  
Latino Population of Rhode Island

