



April 29, 2008

## **CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING ON LATINOS AND HIV/AIDS CALLS FOR HUMANE IMMIGRATION POLICIES**

**BIENESTAR in Conjunction With Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis  
Present Briefing Focused On Alarming HIV/AIDS Rates in the Latino  
Community, Current Immigration Exclusion Policy and the Lack of  
HIV Care in U.S. Immigration Detention Centers**



Bienestar's President Oscar De La O Welcomes Attendees to 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Congressional Briefing

WASHINGTON, DC – During a standing room only event, BIENESTAR emphasized the need for immediate action in response to the current HIV/AIDS rates in the Latino community. Accounting for a startling 71% of new AIDS cases in the US, racial and ethnic minorities represent the majority of people impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Latinos, the country's youngest and fastest growing ethnic population, are increasingly impacted by HIV/AIDS at disproportionate levels. While Latinos represent only 14% of the US population, they account for over 18% of national AIDS cases and are more likely than any other ethnic group to develop AIDS within just one year after receiving their HIV diagnosis.



Oscar De La O & Cesar Portillo Welcome Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard

In a congressional briefing today Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Congresswoman Barbara Lee echoed BIENESTAR's call for action against current HIV/AIDS epidemic.



Congresswoman Maxine Waters

“Representing a district with a large Latino population, I appreciate the efforts of BIENESTAR and its bilingual, bicultural approach. Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS continues to spread rapidly among minority communities. In fact, people of color now represent the majority of new AIDS cases in America, the majority of Americans living with HIV/AIDS and the majority of those who die from AIDS. I will continue to be a strong advocate for HIV/AIDS prevention, education and treatment and to make sure that the needs of minority communities are taken into consideration,” said Congresswoman Waters.



Congresswoman Barbara Lee

The long overdue lifting of the HIV immigration ban was a topic of focus during the Congressional Briefing. Current U.S. law bars the immigration of persons living with HIV and threatens mass deportations of individuals who would otherwise qualify for

normalization of their immigration status. The immigration ban also denies people living abroad the ability to simply visit the U.S. if they HIV positive. Congresswoman Barbara Lee shared her support for finally lifting the ban and stated her desire to one day be able to hold the International AIDS Conference on U.S. soil.



Laura Esquivel Recounts The Tragic Events Leading to Victoria Arellano's Death



Victoria Arellano: 23-year-old woman who died after her HIV medication was denied while in Custody at the San Pedro Immigration Detention Center

HIV experts, community leaders, services providers, and lawmakers also addressed the current lack of HIV care in U.S. Immigration Detention Centers. Remembering the tragic death of Victoria Arellano, Advocacy Director Carol Chodroff from the Human Rights Watch reminded the attendees that the U.S. is part of the international Conventional Against Tortured, and that the taunting, harassment and medical neglect Victoria suffered while in custody is clearly a violation of this convention.

“Tonight we witnessed an amazing energy and desire from Congressional representatives as well as community partners who are willing to continue this fight against HIV/AIDS. It was encouraging to see such a diverse group of people come together in support of the basic human rights of immigrants,” said Oscar De La O. “In the end we can all agree that being HIV positive should not be a death sentence for immigration detainees, nor should it be a valid reason for denying any person the opportunity to legalize their immigration status or simply visit our country.”



Oscar De La O & Congressman Patrick Kennedy



Oscar De La O, Laura Esquivel and Tom Jawetz

BIENESTAR's congressional Briefing included the participation of:

Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Congresswoman Maxine Waters  
Congresswoman Barbara Lee  
Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy  
Alexandra Nuñez on behalf of Senator John Kerry  
Oscar De La O, BIENESTAR's President  
Stephen Morrison Executive Director of the CSIS Task Force on HIV/AIDS  
Dr. Kenneth L. Dominguez from the CDC  
Dr. Timothy Harrison from the Office of HIV/AIDS Policy  
Carol Chodrof Advocacy Director for the Human Rights Watch  
Tom Jawetz from the ACLU  
Evelyn Ullah representing the Steering Committee for the National Latino AIDS Agenda  
Cesar Portillo V.P. of Strategic Development for BIENESTAR  
Laura Esquivel Senior Vice President for Political Affairs at the Gay & Lesbian Victory  
Fund and Leadership Institute  
Miguelina Leon nationally recognized advocate and expert on the HIV/AIDS epidemic

**BIENESTAR** is committed to enhancing the health and well being of the Latino community and other underserved communities. BIENESTAR accomplishes this through community education, prevention, mobilization, advocacy, and the provision of direct social services. For more information visit [www.bienestar.org](http://www.bienestar.org)

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