



Immigrant Women in the Trump/Christie Era

**A Time to Rebuild in New Jersey
September 2017**



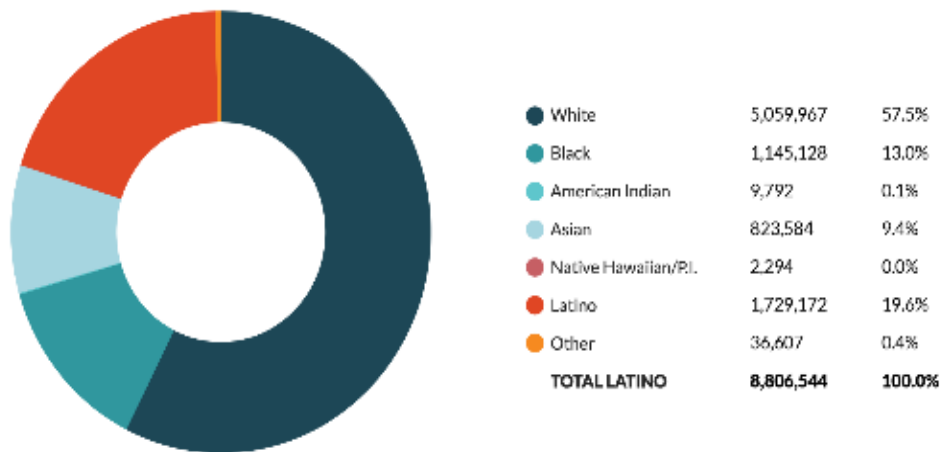
There is a great sense of unease among immigrants in general and women in particular in New Jersey after nearly eight years of the Christie Administration and the increasing hostility of a national government lead by a president that centered his campaign on rooting out immigrants he identified as “drug dealers and rapists.”ⁱ In an effort to address the mounting challenges faced by immigrant women, and specifically Latinas, the Community Affairs Resource Center of Monmouth County and the Latino Action Network Foundation convened a Roundtable on June 23, 2017.

Panelists were selected from the professionals and clients of the Latino community-based non-profits that administer the Women’s Resource Centers, recently re-established, after they were eliminated by Governor Chris Christie in his 2010 budget. After years of petitioning and lobbying elected officials, most notably NJ Senate President Stephen Sweeney and State Senator Teresa Ruiz, the resource centers were re-established in 2016, although Governor Christie froze the funds until October and the monies only became available in March 2017. Funding for the resource centers in the current fiscal year survived a tumultuous budget battle earlier this summer which led to the temporary closing of state government.

The program in both years received \$250,000 to fund three resource centers across New Jersey, including agencies in Asbury Park, Camden and Newark. The allocation is half what the centers received the year before they were eliminated despite the fact that the number of Latinos has dramatically increased.

New Jersey

State Population by Race and Latino Origin, 2014



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, Race (B01002) and Hispanic or Latino Origin by Race (B01003)

Latinos make up approximately 20 percent of the state’s population of 8.9 million, according to a 2016 estimate by the U.S. Census Bureau.ⁱⁱ About 42 percent of the Latino

Foreign-Born Resident Population By State, Top 10 States

California has more foreign-born residents than any other U.S. state by far.

	Foreign-born population	U.S.-born population	Total population	Percent foreign-born
California	10,471,567	28,330,933	38,802,500	27.0
Texas	4,497,584	22,459,374	26,956,958	16.7
New York	4,462,737	15,283,490	19,746,227	22.6
Florida	3,975,817	15,917,480	19,893,297	20.0
New Jersey	1,943,338	6,994,837	8,938,175	21.7
Illinois	1,769,147	11,111,433	12,880,580	13.7
Massachusetts	1,053,605	5,691,803	6,745,408	15.6
Virginia	1,010,544	7,315,745	8,326,289	12.1
Georgia	991,168	9,106,175	10,097,343	9.8
Washington	929,505	6,132,025	7,061,530	13.2

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2014 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS)

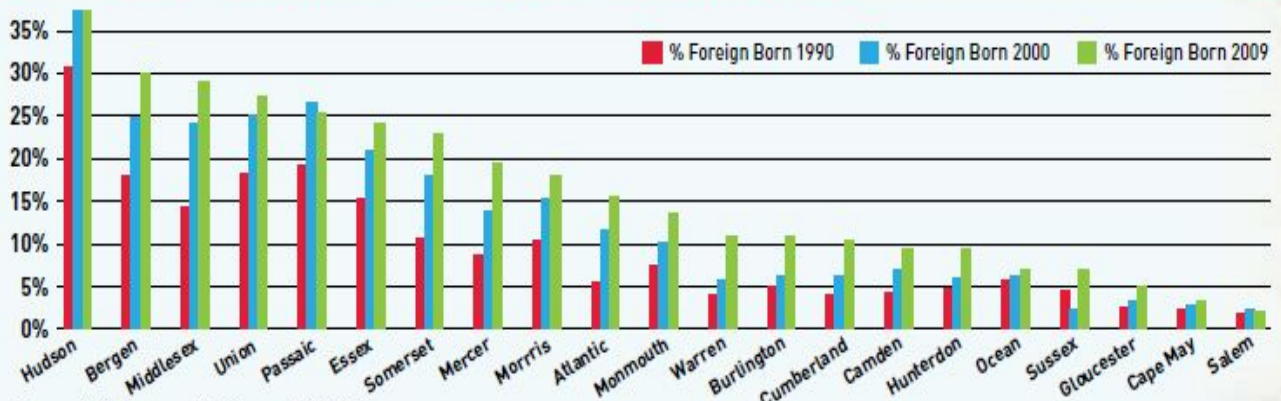
population is foreign born.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the NJ Department of Labor, the Latino population is projected to reach about 27 percent by 2030.^{iv}

To put these growing numbers in perspective the Latino population of New Jersey was 1.1 million in 2000 or about 13 percent of the state's population. Ten years later the

Latino population rose to 1.5 million or about 17.6 percent, and now stands at over 1.7 million.^v

The demographic data is clear. Latinos will constitute an even larger percentage of the population and a greater percentage of the workforce as the white population continues to age.^{vi} In New Jersey, and in many parts of the nation, the immigrant labor force will be crucial to

FIGURE 3. NEW JERSEY COUNTIES: PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION



Source: 1990 Census, 2000 Census, 2009 ACS

economic development in the years ahead which added an extra ironic note to the recent decision by the Trump Administration to support legislation that would cut legal immigration in half within a decade. The argument that 'low-skill, low-wage earners' undercut American workers is central to the administration's policy stance even though study after study indicates that immigrant workers perform many jobs that more established residents are unwilling to do^{vii}

If initial bipartisan reaction is any barometer, the legislation is unlikely to pass, but the anti-immigrant climate fueled by the Trump Administration is certain to continue. Immigrant deportations are now more than ever part of a political strategy to pander to a portion of the president's political base, such as the case of Beatriz Morelos Casillas, 37, an Ohio mother of four deported after a routine traffic stop revealed she was undocumented. The fact that she lived in Ohio for 17 years and has four US born children, between the ages of 4 and 12, apparently did little to convince immigration authorities that she should be given a reprieve.

It is in this climate of perpetual fear that the women's centers persevere providing a small glimmer of hope to Latinas that still believe the United States can offer them a better life. Many of the clients have struggled against impossible odds including the three women who provided short narratives for this report, two of whom took part in the Roundtable, and whose quotes are featured on the back cover of this report.

The history of the centers is a case study in perseverance against long odds. They were created by legislation in 1990 to facilitate the entrance of more Latinas into the workforce and address the unique challenges faced by immigrant women. They were intended to assist Latinas coping with difficult financial and personal circumstances and in some cases spousal abuse.

The tortured history of funding for the resource centers is a microcosm of the ambivalent relationship between the wider society and recent immigrants. When the resource centers were founded 27 years ago they received \$400,000 more than they do currently.

The centers, with their limited budgets, currently focus on English language classes, job readiness preparation and training which includes resume preparation, interviewing skills, and computer training. These skills are seen as the starting points for entry into the workforce. However, the centers have sought to work creatively to tailor their programs to their clientele with one agency offering a sewing class so that women with young children can learn to stitch textile patterns at home. The growing field of home health care is another area of emphasis. The centers also prepare women to secure high school equivalency diplomas, although several participants noted the need for greater literacy training since a portion of their clients are not literate in Spanish or English.

Many Latinas are afraid to reach out for help fearing deportation even if they have adequate documentation. Many of the clients that do reach out find themselves trapped in abusive relationships and with few marketable skills. In many of these cases, the principal wage earner is the abusive partner so job training is vital if these women are to escape violent circumstances and establish economic independence. Also, there is a large group of Latinas that come to the United States with advanced professional degrees from their native countries who are unable to practice in their field of choice because of the lack of opportunities, resources and more important the lack of knowledge of the American culture and processes.

The resource centers offer the promise of a better quality of life. With this in mind the organizers of the Roundtable asked the participants to consider the following questions and be prepared to discuss them on the day of the event:

What unique challenges do immigrant women face in the Trump era?

On a state level, what new policies should we advocate for as we prepare for a new gubernatorial administration? What legislation should we advocate for?

What sorts of service deficiencies exist and how can we best address those issues?

The goal was to develop an action plan as to how to proceed in this uncertain political and economic climate. Each participant was asked to consider a set of achievable goals in the next year on the local and state levels. They were asked to develop an action plan and a set of steps for legislators to consider that would improve the lives of immigrants in general and Latinas, more specifically.

This report is a modest effort to create a blueprint for change in New Jersey. There are some opportunities for constructive change in the near future. Governor Christie's term ends in January and he was no friend of the downtrodden during his eight years in power. His policies consistently favored the wealthy. An issue that came up during the Roundtable was Christie's decimation of the Center for Hispanic Policy and Research Development by cutting its budget in half and transferring its operation from the Department of Community Affairs to the Department of State.

There is a sense that either of the two major party candidates, Phil Murphy for the Democrats, and Kim Guadagno, for the Republicans, will be an improvement, although Guadagno's occasional anti-immigrant rhetoric is a cause for concern.

The panelists noted that underfunding and culturally insensitive programming remain perennial challenges. In many parts of the state psychological and sexual abuse counseling and even basic health care information is unavailable in Spanish, a serious setback for those attempting to communicate complex concepts. One panelist noted that domestic violence counseling and services were not readily available in Spanish in Essex County, the state's most populous region.

After a day of deliberation and debate the panelists, via consensus, developed a series of recommendations to effect positive change on the state and local level. These changes will assist New Jersey Latinas to ride out the national storm swirling around immigration. The recommendations are as follows:

No. 1 – Passage of State Legislation allowing undocumented immigrants to drive. The panelists believed that Latino civil rights organizations, such as the Latino Action Network, should prioritize this legislation in meeting with State Legislators.

New Jersey Latinos, perhaps more than in other parts of the country, suffer as a result of the state's disjointed mass transit system. It is a suburban state so getting from one place to another, without a car, can be a frustrating and circuitous process.

Latinos are no longer concentrated in New Jersey's larger cities, as was true in the past, but the 2010 Census indicated that the community has spread across the state to suburban and

rural areas. According to New Jersey Policy Perspective 464,000 out of 525,000 undocumented New Jersey residents will benefit from a law change.^{viii} The think tank estimates the state could rake in millions of dollars in revenue from license fees. In addition, a Pew report points out that nearly 37 percent of the estimated 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States now live in places where they can get driver's licenses.^{ix} Of this population, 22 percent, or an estimated 2.4 million people, reside in California. Allowing unauthorized immigrants to obtain a driver's license comes with a variety of benefits, ranging from improved roadway safety to economic gains from additional vehicle sales.

No. 2 – The State needs to reinvigorate and restructure the partnership it had with the Latino community. One step is to renovate the role of the Center for Hispanic Policy Research and Development [CHPRD]. In 2010, the Christie Administration cut the Center's budget in half from \$5 million to \$2.5 million and eventually moved it from the Department of Community Affairs to the Department of State. The Center lost its uniquely Latino/Hispanic focus and programs became estranged from the community of Latino community-based non-profits.

When the Center was moved to the NJ Department of State its mission was politicized. The Center is currently administered by a political appointee, Executive Director Abraham Lopez, and an Advisory Committee appointed by the Governor. Most of the programs it funds are not rooted in the Latino community but are part of a much larger entity serving a broader constituency.^x

As pointed out in this report the Latino community needs considerably more resources to rejuvenate its diverse community programs and the State should return funding to the level of \$5 million dedicated to Hispanic organizations that offer the most to those who need the most help. This partnership should be a public-private collaboration. Part of these resources can allow the CHPRD to sustain its most positive programs like internships and training. The bulk of these resources should go through private organizations that have experience providing grants to community organizations that help integrate Latinos and provide opportunities to improve employment and the quality of life of Latino families.

No. 3 – The funding for the Women's Resource Centers needs to be tied into a secure funding source codified in legislation. Funding for the centers are subjected to political whims on an annual basis. The most practical way to address this issue would be to legislatively link the centers to a specific funding source.

Programmatic achievements cannot be maintained when funding is discontinued for years and then only partially restored. The erratic nature of funding amounts to a failure by political leaders to recognize the important needs of a vital segment of the community and a failure of community leaders in rallying behind the program.

No. 4 – Federal and State Grants under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [WIOA], which in New Jersey are administered by the State Department of Labor, should fund programs emphasizing basic reading skills. This is of particular importance for those taking ESL and HSE [High School Equivalency] preparation in Spanish.

The HSE test is available in English and Spanish, but there are none or minimum accessibility of preparation classes for Spanish HSE. This should be changed in all counties. The WIOA regulations focus primarily on credentials and jobs, which makes it difficult for the low-level learner and ESL population to reach the desired outcome. This often leads providers not to service this population since it will be difficult to reach successful outcomes.

No. 5 – Creation of a state-funded child care program for women attending job training courses as part of the work of the Hispanic Women’s Centers and other similar programs.

The allocation of funds for childcare while Latina mothers attend classes can signify the difference between a lifetime of dependency on government services and financial freedom for them and the next generation. Training and education are intricately linked to finding good paying jobs and becoming financially independent.

No. 6 – Expansion of Interpretive and Translation Services in the State Superior Court system and in hospitals and other health care facilities. Latinos frequently face a situation where they receive medical treatment or court information from people in a language they do not understand.

There need to be stricter regulations and guidelines requiring Spanish-language services in the courts, hospitals and other health care facilities. This needs to be addressed through additional legislation and regulation. The panelists also urged civil rights organizations to keep a watchful eye on these organizations to insure that proper language services are provided.

The lack of culturally and linguistically sensitive programs has plagued Latino communities for decades. This issue is paramount in the courts and hospitals where miscommunication can lead to dire consequences. The topic of interpretative and translation services should be the focus of a separate roundtable.

No. 7 – Reform Domestic Violence Programs to provide additional services for battered spouses particularly in the area of transportation and court interpretive services. These additional services, could in part be done through the Women’s Resource Centers, but a statewide effort is required. Collaborative programs that increase access to bilingual/bicultural domestic violence mental health and supportive services.

The panelists reported that domestic violence was, unfortunately, a common experience among women participating in the Women’s Resource Centers. Social science research has confirmed that Hispanic immigrant women are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence and

less likely to seek help than White women. Latina immigrant women face unique challenges in breaking free from domestic violence. Specifically, the availability, affordability, accessibility of services, accommodation of language and cultural needs, were all identified as commonly encountered barriers among panelists when working with women experiencing domestic violence. Panelists noted that the current hostility toward immigrants prevented women from accessing services due to fear of immigration raids in public service institutions. In addition, frontline staff frequently noted the many times that they served as the primary social support for these women. One panelist shared her story of how the Women's Resource Center facilitated the financial independence that she needed to escape her abuser. Agency staff shared countless stories of how the Women's Resource Center provided concrete services such as transportation to appointments, interpretation services, employment training, positive self-development, and information and referral. These are services that help Hispanic immigrant women become independent and reduce the risk of intimate partner violence.

For these reasons, increasing the funding towards the Women's Resource Centers is imperative if the goal is to empower Latinas. Increase in funding could facilitate agency staff to provide more outreach to bridge the service disparity gap. Agency staff noted a need for prevention workshops to facilitate healthy relationships and assertiveness education among immigrant women. Increase in funding could also provide opportunities for agency staff to obtain additional training.

The issues advocated by the Roundtable panelists rub against the grain of the current anti-immigrant sentiment. But, the overwhelming determination of the panelists was that social service providers and advocates must do their part to confront xenophobic elements in society. The best interests of the nation ultimately lie on the path of diversity and acceptance. There is a responsibility to confront and engage with civility those who would plunge us into an era of incivility and callousness.

The pendulum of incivility will eventually swing back to greater tolerance. These suggestions are aimed at furthering that goal.

The Participants in the Roundtable were:

Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz, Latino Action Network Foundation, Board Member.

Sandra Fernandez, Family Support Worker for FSC, La Casa de Don Pedro

Martha Johnston, Domestic Violence Counselor, Youth, Family and Health Service Division, La Casa de Don Pedro

Yocibel Mejia, MPA, Director of Operations, Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey, Inc.

Wendy Melendez, Division Director, Personal Development Division, La Casa de Don Pedro

Deedee Montanaro, Program Manager, Community Affairs and Resource Center

Beatriz Oesterheld, Executive Director, Community Affairs and Resource Center

Jennifer Torres Del Valle, Program Director of Family Resource Center and Health Education Unit. Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey.

Several clients participated in the Roundtable but their names have been omitted to protect their confidentiality.

This report was co-authored by Frank Argote-Freyre, Daniel Santo Pietro and Lazaro Cardenas who served as facilitators at the Roundtable.

Women's Stories



My experience in this program has been so meaningful. Just the fact I have the opportunity to study makes me feel like a champion already. My course is for certification as a Judicial and Medical Interpreter for ELP (English Limited Proficiency) in consecutive, simultaneous and sight translation (English - Spanish). It makes me feel great, the fact I'm doing what I want, and in the near future I will be able to help my community. This course is definitely life changing for different reasons and I would like to name some for you: Classmates (because all my family is in Colombia. I did not have close friends here, just the usual communication between boss – employee). Over these months, I have met wonderful people and I can call some of them friends, because we keep in touch and treat each other like family. Secondly, the fact we all came from different places and have certain life styles makes it even more interesting. I have been learning more about different cultures and that helps a lot as an interpreter, so that I may be able to break cultural barriers or beliefs.

I really hope to keep improving my knowledge and abilities and to see more Latin American women doing the same.

Diana Yazmín Ramirez Zárate
Neptune, NJ

I am a 35-year-old mother of four children. In my country, I was a Registered Nurse for about 11 years. I came to the United States pursuing the possibility of a better life for me and my kids. I fell in love and married a man who ended up being abusive to me and my children. I was always known for being happy, self-motivated, independent, hardworking and self-confident. This relationship drowned me in guilt and shame and I lost complete control over my own life, listening to his words when he said I would never make it here (in the US) alone with 4 children. I left my aggressor. I knocked on a lot of doors, looking for any possibilities for me to start working and gain my independence again. I had plans back then to get my Nursing license in New Jersey. It seemed impossible because I didn't have the money to do it. During this long journey, I met Darlene Montanaro over the phone, from the Hispanic Women's Resource Center. When I talked to her I was staying in a Domestic Violence safety house and explained to her the whole situation. I told her that I wanted to move forward. I wanted to get back on my feet. Long story short, she contacted me days later trying to learn more about me and she started to help me. The Hispanic Women's Resource Center helped me to pay the Board of Nursing Registration and the test so I could complete all the requirements to become a nurse. It was not only a financial help but knowing I was being heard, that someone did care for me and my kids, and was aware of my situation really gave me strength to keep moving forward. I have to say that Ms. Montanaro and the staff at CARC were there for me during the darkest of my days, and that helped me gain confidence again and see there was a possibility for me to move on.

This client's name was redacted because of concerns for her safety.

I began frequenting the Hispanic Women's Resource Center (HWRC) in May of 2017. The Center I attended was located at the Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey in Camden. I worked previously as a police officer in Puerto Rico before moving to the United States in December of 2015 to be closer to my family. When I arrived, I took jobs that were unfulfilling given my past work experience. The Women's Resource Center guided me to identify my goals. A primary goal for me was improving my computer skills since I am not "computer savvy." Many jobs are now posted online and my lack of computer proficiency was a big disadvantage. In addition to working on my computer skills, I took English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the center. I am still a work in progress. I attend computer workshops at the center every Wednesday. I also drop by the center to use their computers to apply for jobs and check my email. I now have an updated resume and regularly apply for jobs online. In the coming months, I hope to secure my long-term goal of a new job, one that is more in line with my experience and skills.

This client's name was redacted because she wished to remain anonymous.

Endnotes:

ⁱ See Donald Trump's Presidential announcement. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TML2cApMueU>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NJ>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/state/nj/>

See NJ Department of Labor data:

^{iv} <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/content/njsdc/2013WU%20PopLFProj2030.pdf>

^v For 2000 Census figures see

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

For 2010 data see comparative data:

<http://censusviewer.com/state/NJ>

^{vi} See NJ Department of Labor data:

<http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/content/njsdc/2013WU%20PopLFProj2030.pdf>

^{vii} <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/us/immigrants-arent-taking-americans-jobs-new-study-finds.html>

^{viii} <https://www.njpp.org/reports/share-the-road-allowing-eligible-undocumented-residents-access-to-drivers-licenses-makes-sense-for-new-jersey>

^{ix} <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/collections/2015/12/alternative-drivers-licenses-for-unauthorized-immigrants>

^x http://www.nj.gov/state/programs/dos_program_chprd.html