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**Testimony to the Illinois State Board of Education
Regarding Proposed Rule Amendments to §§ 228 and 235
Presented by Reyna Hernandez, Research and Policy Associate, Latino Policy Forum
Thursday, October 29, 2009**

My name is Reyna Hernandez. I am a Research and Policy Associate with the Latino Policy Forum. You heard from my colleague, Martin Torres, at the budget hearings last week. The Latino Policy Forum is a non-profit advocacy organization focused on empowering the Latino community through collective action in order to transform public policies that will ensure the well-being of our community and the state as a whole. We focus on early childhood education policy, as well as housing and immigration, at the local and statewide levels. As an organization particularly interested in improving the delivery of services to Latinos and English language learners (ELLs), we would like to state our support for the general spirit of the proposed rules changes to §§ 228 and 235, as they relate to integrating bilingual services into state-funded preschool programs.

We believe these rule changes will help our state close the achievement gap that we see in the later grades between ELLs and their peers. Furthermore, in a state that is proud of its high quality early childhood programs, these changes will elevate the level of quality which we offer ELLs to that currently enjoyed by their peers. Addressing the complexities of language acquisition requires specialized knowledge, methods, and materials. Because language is so inextricably intertwined with the various areas of child development, especially at this age, failing to address a child's language acquisition process hinders our ability to fully assess and further a child's language and literacy development.

These rule changes are not without precedent. Legislation similar to these new rules was introduced by then Sen. Del Valle in 1995. More recently, these proposed rules would make advances towards the recommendations made to the Illinois Early Learning Council last year by the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Committee, which we staff. They are also in line with the practices highlighted in our report, *Transforming Early Learning: Educational Equity for Young Latinos*, released earlier this year.

We, along with our network of providers, support the purpose of the rules; however, we have concerns about a few specific aspects of the changes.

- First, the timeline for the teacher certification requirements seems untenable, considering the high demand and low supply of dually certified teachers (with both a Type 04 early childhood certificate and a bilingual or ESL approval) and the requirement that bilingual teachers be proficient in both languages. **We recommend the inclusion of a waiver option for programs showing a good faith effort to meet the requirements.**
- We are also concerned about the discrepancy in the applicability of these rules to community-based organizations within Chicago by default, but not to similar providers outside of Chicago. Programs within the City of Chicago do not have the option to seek funding directly from ISBE, thus avoiding being school district-administered.

Recommendations, similar to these rules, made by the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Committee last year for changes to the Preschool for All RFP would have applied to *all* state-funded programs. **We recommend that the rules apply to all programs, as best practice would suggest.**

- A third concern is the added expense to programs without specification that they will become eligible for additional funds. **The proposed rules should specify that preschool programs, including community-based programs, will be eligible for bilingual funds.**
- There is a need for additional resources to build up the early childhood-bilingual/ESL workforce. Higher education will need to respond to such a change by targeting more programs specifically for early childhood AND bilingual/ESL. Despite our difficult economic times, **ISBE should also set-aside professional development funds to meet this workforce demand.**

We are very pleased to see this systematic change to address the needs of bilingual children in preschool, and are committed to helping move this process forward. Thank you very much for your time and attention.