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Cuqui Rivera

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MS. RIVERA: It's definitely a pleasure to be here, and I'm not from Newark but I represent many Latino forces within New Jersey that I would feel honored to introduce you to today and to also describe to you what Latino leadership has been doing regarding the subject matter that we're discussing today.

I am involved in many things, as you will see in a minute, but I'm also a mother with many children and many even more grandchildren and this is kind of what drives me and many of us here to do what we do.

I am employed by the Hispanic Director's Association of New Jersey, and what that is is 32 at this moment community-based organizations throughout the state, of which last time we counted we serve about 700,000 families every single year, and of that number, 40 percent of that number are non-Latino. This is important because we are community based and community led. That's important as well.

I also am the State Secretary of the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, and that is a body of Latino leaders which incorporates networks like the Hispanic Director's, networks like the Hispanic Teachers, networks like the Latino Peace Officers Association as well as leadership from the Mexican community, the Puerto Rican community, etcetera, and those ethnic leaders as well.

There are over 200 Latino organizations involved with that membership. That membership also at this moment celebrates about nine local chapters, which are county chapters that are developed to also serve and do advocacy at the local level, of which there is some work in Essex County in developing an Essex County chapter but it has not yet actually taken shape.

I am also the Planning Chair of something called the New Jersey Community and Corrections Working Summit, Impacting Communities of Color, which was an initiative that was created in 2002 which was to deal with minority overrepresentation of the incarcerated throughout New Jersey and how to fix it.

The way we were able to do that was historic and we are very proud to have been able to for the first time in New Jersey history as we celebrate that we were able to join black and Latino leaders and advocates statewide through the Hispanic Director's Association and the New Jersey Black Issues Convention where we were able to join our communities with, for the first time as well, the New Jersey Department of Corrections and the New Jersey State Parole Board in which we were able to create a report and a framework to say from this collective of minds and energies this is how you fix our situation when it comes to legislation, to policing, to sentencing guidelines. This is how

we see that issue be fixed when it comes to incarcerated and rehabilitative or habilitative services. This is how we see that this should work with successful and sustainable re-entry.

This has never been done before for the adult population of the incarcerated community in New Jersey. This comes from a conference that was conducted in the early '90s from the Juvenile Justice Commission of which within the '90s five years in a row the Juvenile Justice Commission was able to say that minority overrepresentation of the Juvenile Justice Commission is the theme for five years in a row of the work that they would do. This is very important as well.

Since then, we released this report in 2003. It is on our website. What we were able to continue was with the New Jersey Black Issues Convention we were able to look at ourselves and work together with ourselves to figure out how to increase how we can work together and make things better.

On June 19th of this year with the additional blessing of Roland Anglin's institute of public policy, we also conducted a black and Latino round table statewide, which was with select leaders from our communities to say, well, we did this right. What else can we do right? What can we not do? What are the differences and extreme similarities from our communities that we have to look at head on for us to really move forward in some collective way.

The way I would also describe this Summit initiative is to explain to you that when this started in 2002, there was something in New Jersey called The Black and Latino Legislative Caucus, and in that year that caucus went its separate ways.

As we look back and we look forward to today, as far as the Latino leadership -- as far as Latino leaders are concerned at this moment, it seems that this bond, this work and this energy is where our two communities maintain its strongest support and if I say something as the Chair of the Summit, Jerome Harris, the Board Chair of the Black Issues Convention, will say the same thing and vice versa because we have stayed together for this particular subject of violence and to make our communities better. We have tried to have a second round table with the Public Policy Institute.

The issue of all of these things that I've described to all of you is that this is all volunteer. Many of you are here on a Saturday. We don't have jobs that help us do this kind of work and it's very difficult for people who are so involved and so true to what we're fighting for to actually contribute in any real way, and there is a lot to be said for where we can go, but it is not to say -- someone to say to us how to do that.

I would close by saying that this summer Newark specifically endured some heavy duty things of which the Attorney General even created a directive regarding. It seems to have come out of Newark.

When these tragedies in the summer occurred, we were all very much aware and very ready to come and be helpful in any way possible, but we would not impose ourselves on Newark, and, in fact, we stayed back. And what we were able to see was the most magical recipe for how things should be done coming out of Newark itself.

The way Newark addressed this issue through the summer without anybody's help from outside is a recipe for all of us not only in New Jersey, but everywhere to figure out that families do know how to do this if we work together well, and I think that Newark should bottle what they did this summer with the unity between the black and Latino communities here and addressing that and standing firm and the way that you addressed it.

Please help us and contribute to us to continue our work forward.

Thank you.