Commission on Latino Community Development

May 12, 2020

The meeting began at 6.36pm with the following attending: Johnny Garcia as Chair, Margarita Dilone, Gustavo Viteri, Pamela Cervera, Miozotis Florez Ruiz, Angelica Mercado, Dr. Angelo Gomez, Alexis Vigil, Nelson Cruz, Henderson Kelly, Jill Byrd, Robin Imperial, Ramon Perez-Goizueta, Jackie Reyes, Camilo Manjarres, and Dora Currea as notetaker.

Chair thanked Jackie and staff for keeping the Commission informed about the coronavirus developments and the Mayor’s responses. Noted that the main goal was to elicit suggestions as an input into an official statement from the Commission to the Reopen DC Advisory Group.

Agenda Item #1: MOLA Director’s Report focused on the COVID19 response efforts:

* Office has remained open and it’s hotline (202) 671-2525 has fielded over 500 calls seeking information/assistance with rent & tenants rights (under subleases), food, support for those not eligible for unemployment insurance, support in filing unemployment claims.
  + Ramon noted that DOES webpage allows for applying for unemployment benefits in Spanish: <https://does.optimumui.com/#!/login>
* Office has worked diligently to ensure that all press releases are translated.
* Office has helped to divulge information on micro grants for small business (support in obtaining good standing certificates from DRA) as well as grants for the arts & humanities.
* Office has given direct to support to seniors in our community:
  + Securing COVID19 testing priority for residents in Casa Iris and Vida center
  + Applying for 80 devices and broadband access for seniors
  + Organizing Senior Townhall virtually once the devices are available.
* So far there are 1416 latin@s tested positive and 32 have died.
* Questions from Commissioners focused on:
  + Testing priorities are described at <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/testing>
  + Food assistance is available via: selected school sites (including groceries for families as well as meals for students); for those unable to leave their homes, hotline 1-888-349-8322 will take food and other essentials; additional private (church and non-profits) efforts to stock food banks and deliver food (Ward mutual aid society).

Agenda Item #2: Johnny and Dora participated with a focus group on May 7 from the Equity and Vulnerable Groups Task Force of the Reopen DC group. The discussion focused on the need to take the following into account in reopen plans:

* Messaging should be clear, inclusive (including Spanish) and compelling taking into account cultural sensitivities.
* Agree that reopening plans should strive to improve pre-crisis problems with inequitable access to services and fresh foods.
* Any plan from the eleven group committees (<https://coronavirus.dc.gov/reopendc>) should consider the differential impact on vulnerable groups, in particular those who are undocumented, or under DACA, TPS and other immigrant programs now under threat at the federal level. Many within our Latinx community fall under these categories, pay taxes, and work in services considered essential.
* Need to work with utilities/providers to improve access to distance learning given that this will continue into the foreseeable future even when schools reopen.
* Need to work with business encourage them to “pledge” to follow the reopening precautions.

Questions/comments from Commissioners:

* Events DC funds for those excluded from federal support -- the Director noted that the procurement process was underway and already there is a list of those who are requesting these funds.
* Many workers in the Latinx community cannot afford to stop work even without being provided protections by employers. The result is that entire households are getting sick from the virus.
* Could some of the numbers on African-American positives and deaths include hispanics? Ramon informed that non-white hispanics self identify as hispanic.
* In response to Alexis’ question about Commissioner input, Johnny as Chair requested Commissioners to provide written input by May 14 COB.

Chair thanked Commissioners for their participation and closed the meeting at 7:51pm.