



Charting Our Path: The 2025 Connecticut Latino Policy Agenda Summit

Authored in collaboration with Connecticut General Assembly’s Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO), UConn School of Social Work, Puerto Rican/Latino Studies Project, UConn El Instituto, and UConn Puerto Rican Studies Initiative

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Executive Summary

Charting Our Path: The 2025 Connecticut Latino Policy Agenda Summit convened on October 4, 2025, at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, CT. The Summit brought together policymakers, community leaders, researchers, and advocates to examine the pressing social, economic, and political issues affecting Connecticut’s Latino communities. Building on the foundation established in the previous year’s Summit, the 2025 Summit served as a bridge between community dialogue and actionable policy, ensuring that the lived experiences of Latinos continue to inform the state’s legislative agenda. Through a primary legislative panel and ten thematic breakout sessions, participants analyzed how structural inequities intersect and identified policy pathways for addressing them through coordinated state action.

Jointly organized by the Connecticut General Assembly’s Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO) and the University of Connecticut (UConn) through El Instituto, the Puerto Rican Studies Initiative, and the School of Social Work, the Summit advanced a shared goal: to transform collective insights into policy-driven solutions that promote equity and inclusion across sectors.

The Summit was informed by four community listening sessions held in East Hartford, New Britain, and Manchester. These sessions, coded and thematically analyzed, revealed persistent barriers related to institutional trust, civic engagement, housing stability, linguistic access, and the availability of critical community resources. These community insights directly shaped the Summit’s policy discussions and reinforced themes that continue to emerge year after year. For more information, please see “Methodology.”

Across sessions, several patterns were clear: residents continue to experience high housing costs and limited pathways to homeownership; students face enduring educational inequities; healthcare access is constrained by cost, coverage limits, and language barriers; digital access gaps are widening with the rise of artificial intelligence; and environmental burdens disproportionately fall on Latino neighborhoods. Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for culturally competent communication, equitable program design, and meaningful representation within state decision-making.

Across sessions, participants reaffirmed that institutional distrust, discrimination, and limited access to information remain major barriers to full participation in civic life. Moving forward, we recommend legislators and stakeholders to continue to align state and local policy with the insights gained from these dialogues—advancing initiatives that expand educational opportunity, housing stability, public health equity, and equitable digital access for Connecticut’s growing Latino population.

Methodology

In 2025, four listening sessions were conducted in East Hartford, New Britain, and Manchester, with a total of 63 participants utilizing a convenience sample. Each session was recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. Four researchers independently coded the transcripts to identify themes. The objective of the listening sessions was to identify community priorities, barriers, needs, and recommendations that could be elevated to Connecticut’s Latino legislative caucus. These insights informed the Summit’s agenda and shaped the subsequent policy analysis.

Legislative Panel Summary

The Legislative Panel convened Connecticut Latino lawmakers and policymakers to address pressing issues including immigration, civic participation, and federal overreach. Panelists emphasized the rapid growth of Connecticut’s Latino population, noting that increased representation in state government reflects both the shifting demographics and the expanding needs of the community. They explained the importance of Latino leadership not only at the state level but also in federal policymaking, arguing that representation is essential for effective civic engagement and advocacy. The panel also highlighted the effect of increased ICE raids, noting that fear has affected many people from attending school, seeking healthcare, or participating in the community. Panelists urged Latinos to get involved in local and state politics, and raise their voices.

Key Policy Focus Areas

1. Housing Equity and Affordability

Housing emerged as the top priority for legislative action. The session “*The Latino Housing Crisis: What Happens When Policy Fails?*” highlighted the urgent need for structural reforms following Governor Lamont’s veto of H.B. 5002. Concerns about local control, implementation pace, and funding clarity contributed to the bill’s failure despite widespread recognition of the housing crisis.

Key recommendations:

- Establishing rent stabilization measures and caps on annual rent increases
- Investing state surplus and rainy-day funds into large-scale affordable housing development
- Expanding community-based homeownership programs to address racial gaps in homeownership (33.7% Hispanic vs. 77% White)

- Enacting tenant and small landlord protections and democratizing housing policy governance

Although not specifically discussed at the Summit, participants’ focus on homeownership equity reinforces the need to expand funding for the Connecticut Housing Department’s successful Time to Own program, which assists first-time buyers—particularly from underrepresented communities—in achieving homeownership. These reforms align with Connecticut’s legislative capacity and ongoing public demand for housing relief, making this a prime area for bipartisan engagement.

2. Education Equity and Access

Education policy—spanning both K–12 and higher education—represents the second major policy frontier. Sessions led by Rep. Bobby Sanchez and Rep. Farley Santos highlighted disparities in school funding, insufficient support for multilingual learners, barriers to postsecondary education, and the threat of federal education cuts.

Key recommendations:

- Rewriting the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula to ensure equity across districts
- Expanding bilingual and multicultural education and guaranteeing multilingual accountability in state commitments
- Increasing scholarships and institutional support for first-generation Latino students in higher education
- Addressing student housing and food insecurity at Connecticut colleges and universities

These align with established state frameworks and are well-positioned for near-term progress.

3. Health Access and Equity

The session “*Latino Health at Risk: Federal Shifts and the Future of Public Health Access*” underscored persistent disparities. With 45% of Latinos relying on Medicaid or public programs, recent federal cuts pose substantial risks.

Key recommendations:

- Restoration and expansion of Medicaid/HUSKY coverage to include all income-eligible residents regardless of immigration status
- Increased state funding for bilingual and community health clinics
- Public health outreach and vaccination programs in Latino neighborhoods
- Collaborative funding initiatives across hospitals, nonprofits, and local governments to ensure sustainability

Health access legislation continues to build on Connecticut’s successful HUSKY expansions and could serve as a model for inclusive public health reform.

4. Food Insecurity and Nutrition Equity

With one in four Hispanic residents experiencing food insecurity, recommended policies include:

- Establishing a state-level SNAP supplement to fill federal funding gaps.
 - Expanding universal free school meals statewide.
 - Launching a Nutrition Equity Grant Program for bilingual and immigrant-serving organizations.
 - Incentivizing healthy food options in local bodegas through state grants.
- These policies build on Connecticut’s momentum under *Public Act 23-204*, advancing culturally relevant solutions to hunger and nutrition equity.

5. Environmental Justice and Climate Resilience

Using CT DEEP and CIRCA tools, the Summit reinforced the need for:

- Creation of micro-parks and bioretention centers in Latino neighborhoods.
 - Multilingual climate communication requirements for state agencies.
 - Youth environmental leadership programs under DEEP.
 - Stronger regulation of waste-management facilities in environmental justice areas.
- Connecticut’s environmental infrastructure and current resilience funding make these policy shifts highly feasible.

6. Civic Engagement and Representation

The “*Civic Power*” session emphasized that Latinos represent 10% of the state’s population but only 6% of the Citizen Voting Age Population. The session recommended:

- Integrating civic and constitutional education into state curriculum standards.
 - Providing grant funding to community organizations for civic education and voter outreach.
 - Strengthening language-access requirements for state election materials.
 - Supporting leadership development programs for Latino youth and emerging leaders.
- These initiatives would expand participation and align with Connecticut’s broader goals for representative democracy.

2025 Latino Policy Summit Legislative Panels

Latino Health at Risk: Federal Shifts and the Future of Public Health Access

Moderator: State Representative Hilda E. Santiago

Panelists: Ken Barela, Pareesa Charmchi-Goodwin, Juan Salazar

The session examined threats to Latino health resulting from federal budget cuts, loss of Medicaid/HUSKY coverage, and reduced clinic capacity. In 2023, 19% of Latino adults in

Connecticut reported not receiving needed healthcare, underscoring affordability barriers (Data Haven, 2023, pg. 5). Hispanic residents are also three times more likely to be uninsured than White residents (Connecticut Health, pg. 1). Listening session participants reinforced challenges with bilingual communication; one noted, “And you realize it in hospitals [that] sometimes you don't know how to speak English,” referring to challenges with understanding medical terminology (New Britain, 2025, 34:49). Recommendations included funding collaboratives, extending coverage to green card holders and children, taxing billionaires, and improving vaccination outreach.

The Immigration Crisis: Responding to Fear with Justice

Moderator: State Representative Juan Candelaria

Panelists: Glenn Formica, Carlos Candal, Edwin Colón

This session focused on due process violations, psychological harm caused by federal enforcement, and ICE overreach. Connecticut—where 25% of the Hispanic population is foreign-born—faces heightened anxiety due to misinformation (NCLR, pg. 1). As a New Britain participant stated, “due to fear, there is no reliable information” (New Britain, 2025, 00:07). Policy recommendations included designating ICE-free courthouse zones, returning detainees from federal custody, compensating individuals who were illegally detained, requiring legal representation in ICE encounters, and making legal solutions accessible for everyday residents.

The Latino Housing Crisis: What Happens When Policy Fails?

Moderator: State Representative Antonio Felipe

Panelists: Fernando Betancourt, Maribel La Luz, Wildaliz Bermudez

This session addressed Connecticut's housing affordability crisis and structural barriers disproportionately harming Latino communities. In Connecticut, homeownership rates are 33.7% for Hispanic households compared to 77.0% for White households, representing one of the nation's largest gaps (Urban Institute). Listening session comments included “we need housing that we can actually have access to,” capturing the urgency (New Britain, 2025, 00:41). Recommendations included rent stabilization and rent cap increases, investment of surplus and rainy-day funds into affordable housing, stronger tenancy protections, and democratized housing-policy governance.

K-12 Education - The Future of Latino Education in Uncertain Times

Moderator: State Representative Bobby Sanchez

Panelists: Madeline Negrón, Steven Hernandez, Maria Matos

The breakout discussion addressed the persistent inequities within Connecticut's education system, including outdated funding models, unmet equity commitments, and the ongoing devaluation of the teaching profession. Connecticut districts serving the most students of color receive \$4,270 less state and local revenue per student than those serving the fewest (Education Trust). A Manchester listening session participant stated, "if you see that something isn't happening in your community...it's even less for Latino children" (Manchester, 2025, 14:54). Recommendations included: rewriting the ECS formula for equity and fund all schools equally, expanding and protecting multilingual education, accountability and transparency in state commitments, rallying behind Latino values, investing in teachers, and teaching early literacy and mathematics to ensure children are meeting standards.

Latinos and Food Insecurity: Federal Cuts, Local Consequences

Moderator: State Senator Matt Lesser

Panelists: Christian Duborg, Sofia Segura-Perez, Isamar Rodriguez

The breakout session addressed the growing food insecurity crisis among Latino families in Connecticut, emphasizing how federal budget cuts and administrative burdens are compounding long-standing issues of access and affordability. One participant described how Latino parents must choose between "eating and paying rent and daycare" (Manchester, 2025, 20:55). Roughly one in four Hispanic residents experiences food insecurity, compared to one in eight statewide (Dathan, 2024). The panel created five policy recommendations: universal school lunches, extend SNAP to healthy foods (especially in bodegas), extend nutrition and cooking education, designate a budget for nutrition related programs, and provide a state SNAP benefit with CT funds, rather than federal dollars.

Equitable AI: Bridging Trust, Opportunity, and Inclusion in Latino Communities

Moderator: State Representative Aundré Bumgardner

Panelists: Jeff Auken, Councilwoman Maly Rosado, Councilwoman Jesse Muñoz-Poland, Katherine Escalante

The session explored AI's role in municipal services and digital inequity. 35% of Hispanic households lack wireline broadband, compared to 21% of White households (Horrihan, 2020). Only

62% meet the state's Digital Connection Benchmark, and 53% meet the Digital Literacy Benchmark (CT Digital Equity Plan, pg. 82). Participants also discussed the importance of creating equitable opportunities for AI adoption, workforce training, and meaningful participation in technological innovation. Residents emphasized the need for accessible training: "Internet classes for Latinos" (East Hartford, 2025, 27:33). The panel proposed six policy recommendations: making AI accessible to Latino communities; simplifying AI tools for ease of use; developing workforce training programs focused on AI; investing state resources in AI education for underrepresented communities; encouraging universities to offer short AI courses; and creating spaces where community members can share their experiences using AI.

Higher Education at Risk: Securing Latino Access and Opportunity Amid Federal and State Cuts

Moderator: State Representative Farley Santos

Panelists: Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, Rosa E. Rivera-Hainaj

The breakout discussion raised alarms about the multiple pressures facing Latino students in Connecticut: declining enrollments, institutional budget constraints, and the diminishing pathways to inclusive, affordable postsecondary education. Only 18% of Hispanic adults in Connecticut hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 45% of White non-Hispanic adults (Willner, 2022, pg. 10). The discussion emphasized the role of education in shaping mental health, workforce readiness, and economic stability. The panel proposed several policy recommendations: strengthening community connections as a response to institutional challenges; increasing support for first-generation and low-income students; addressing housing and food insecurity among college students; reducing operational costs to allow for greater scholarship funding; promoting multiculturalism and representation in higher education; and fostering more humanized relationships between faculty and students.

Latino Media at a Crossroads: Defending Public Voices, Driving Participation

Moderator: State Representative Hilda Santiago

Panelists: Ana Alfaro, Maria Lino, Daniela Doncel, Vanessa de la Torre, Wilson Camelo

The breakout session discussed the chronic underfunding of Latino media, the lack of representation in newsrooms, and the growing impacts of artificial intelligence on ethnic journalism.

Participants further emphasized that Latino media is essential to community connection, civic engagement, and equitable access to information. These concerns reflect broader statewide patterns: Latino residents are significantly less likely to receive civic information from government agencies and more likely to rely on social media, Spanish-language television, and community-based outlets for trusted information (Gupan & Venator-Santiago, 2025, pg. 10).

However, despite representing 19% of the U.S. population, only 2% of daily newspaper articles mention Latinos (Pedraza et al., 2025). Half of the articles that do mention Latinos portray them negatively or fail to provide substantive representation, while Latino-authored stories are far more likely to include Latino sources, present Latinos earlier in the narrative, and portray Latino communities more accurately and positively (Pedraza et al., 2025). These findings demonstrate the need for sustainable funding, workforce development, and culturally competent communication strategies to ensure that Latino stories continue to be told, especially by Latino journalists.

The panel created five major policy recommendations. First, they called for clear federal and state funding guidelines that specifically target Latino media outlets, including the creation of a state-approved vendor list to ensure Latino-owned agencies are represented and resourced. Second, they urged increased funding for training, equipment, and capacity building through journalism education programs, technical training, and mentorship opportunities for emerging Latino journalists. Third, they stressed the importance of promoting media literacy and community engagement by integrating media education into schools and community programs and by supporting local fact-checking and civic dialogue. Fourth, the panel emphasized that distribution strategies must go beyond language translation to focus on cultural connection, trust building, and collaboration between large media institutions and local Latino outlets. Finally, they encouraged policymakers to frame Latino media support as a strategic investment in civic engagement and economic growth rather than solely as a diversity or equity initiative, highlighting the need to promote storytelling that reflects Latino resilience, leadership, and contributions to Connecticut's future.

Rooted in Resilience: Latino Communities and the Fight for Environmental Justice

Moderator: Councilwoman Iris Sanchez

Panelists: Alex Rodriguez, Dr. Mayra Rodriguez Gonzalez, Kris Lebron Romero

The session informed the community of the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by Latino residents, including limited access to green spaces, poor air and water quality, and increased vulnerability to climate disasters. Listening session data highlighted visible environmental neglect: “There’s people sleeping underneath the trees by the library. There’s individuals...digging through

trash” (New Britain 2, 2025, 34:34). Participants described how underfunding, aging infrastructure, and fear of political backlash have slowed the progress of environmental education and protection programs. Tools have already been created to aid legislators in understanding environmental justice. For example, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), in partnership with the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA), has developed the Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool, an interactive map designed to identify areas with elevated pollution exposure and assess vulnerability based on socioeconomic and demographic factors (CIRCA). Speakers noted that Latino populations are among the most “nature deprived,” with fewer opportunities for outdoor recreation and greater exposure to pollutants from industrial and waste management facilities.

The panel created a comprehensive set of policy recommendations. They emphasized the creation of small parks and “bioretention centers” in partnership with schools, serving both as green spaces and living classrooms for environmental learning. They called for food recovery initiatives to reduce waste and improve air quality, along with specialized youth programs focused on hydroponics, reforestation, and local stewardship. Participants urged that climate and environmental issues be addressed in tandem with housing, health, and immigration policy, advocating for a holistic legislative approach. The session further recommended that Connecticut designate itself as a shelter state for victims of climate disasters and invest in bottom-up, community-driven engagement strategies to fill institutional funding gaps. Stronger regulation of waste management facilities was also discussed as essential to reducing emissions in heavily Latino neighborhoods. A panelist also noted that some nonprofits operating in the Long Island Sound region have experienced delays or were prevented from accessing federal environmental funds. Finally, the panel called for expanded multilingual climate outreach and increased state support for environmental NGOs. By connecting environmental health to public health outcomes, participants underscored that environmental justice is inseparable from the well-being and civic power of Latino communities.

Civic Power: Latino Voices Shaping Connecticut’s Future

Moderator: State Representative Chris Rosario

Panelists: Evelyn Mantilla, Angelo Montes, Tabitha Sookdeo, Magaly Cajigas

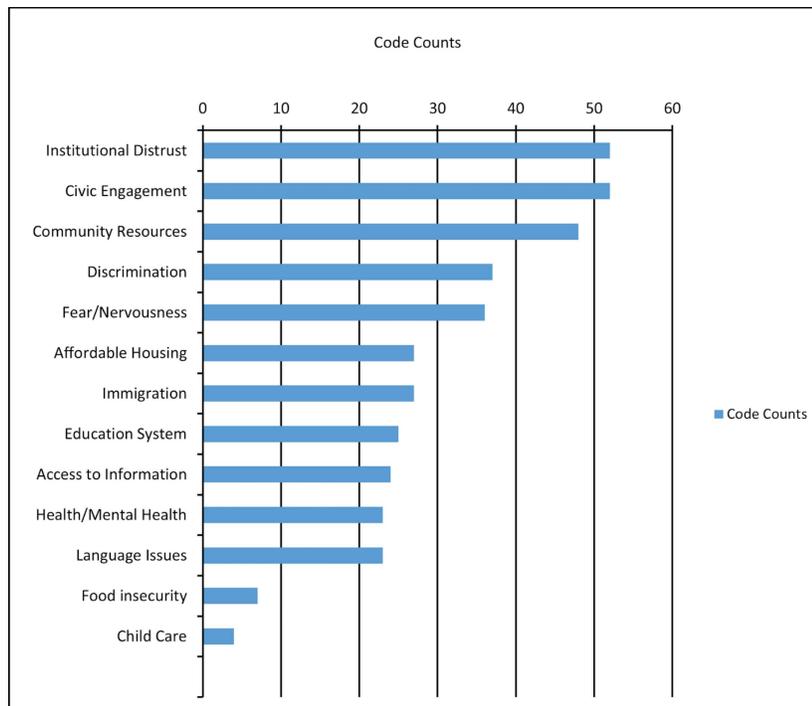
The session discussed the importance of grassroots, community-driven engagement as the foundation of civic power. Latinos represent 10% of Connecticut’s population but only 6% of the Citizen Voting Age Population (Gupan & Venator-Santiago, 2024, pg. 3). One Manchester listening session participant noted, “And we need voices. It doesn’t have to be run by [politicians]. We have enough of those” (Manchester, 2025, 35:31). Participants discussed how listening to local businesses,

families, and youth helps identify real needs and strengthen trust between communities and policymakers. They emphasized that authentic representation and inclusion in leadership and decision-making spaces are key to empowering Latino communities and advancing equitable policies. The discussion also addressed the need for early and continuous youth engagement in civic life, as well as cross-sector collaboration to coordinate advocacy across health, education, and economic issues.

The panel created several policy recommendations to strengthen Latino civic participation. They called for expanding civic and constitutional education to teach residents their rights and foster informed engagement. Participants highlighted the importance of building cross-sector coalitions to amplify shared goals and develop leadership pipelines for youth and underrepresented groups. They recommended greater investment in conversational, story-based outreach that brings policymakers into direct dialogue with communities, alongside advocacy and testimonial coaching to prepare residents to engage confidently with the legislative process. The session also urged increased support for certificate programs, technical skills, and the trades to promote equitable career pathways.

Comparing 2024 to 2025: Converging Issues

This report presents the process and recommendations developed through the 2025 Latino Policy Summit. Notably, many of the challenges raised this year mirror those documented in the 2024 Summit, indicating enduring issues that continue to affect Latino communities statewide. Insights from the 2025 listening sessions reinforce this pattern. The chart below summarizes the concerns identified as most pressing by participants in this year’s discussions.



What Stayed the Same Across 2024 and 2025

The 2024 and 2025 Latino Policy Summits reveal a strong continuity in the core challenges facing Latino communities in Connecticut, while also highlighting several new and emerging areas of concern. Across both years, some of the same themes consistently emerged from the listening sessions:

1. Institutional Distrust

Latino residents continue to express deep skepticism about government responsiveness and follow-through.

2024: “The politicians are corrupt. They like to fill their pockets like a boyfriend when he is in love with a girl. They **promise you many beautiful things** ... [then he says] elegantly ... **he forgot what he promised**” (Hartford, 29:51).

2025: “They invite us to give a talk and then, **once the person is in power**, they **forget everything they promised** ... They organize, they give talks, and then [forget] everything they said” (New Britain, 41:50).

The sentiment remained nearly identical—participants continue to feel unheard after elections, and mistrust remains a barrier to participation.

2. Linguistic Justice and Information Barriers

Language access issues continue to restrict families’ ability to navigate schools, healthcare, and government systems.

2024: “But not all parents have the knowledge because they don’t speak English ... They **don’t know what’s there**” (New Haven, 29:40).

2024: “Personally it bothers me a lot that **education programs are created for Hispanics but in English**. So there is no translation ... what is translated does not really capture the essence of what they really want to present” (Waterbury, 8:47).

2024: “[In hospitals they say] sorry, but **we don’t have an interpreter** ... someone who speaks Spanish” (New Haven, 22:42).

2024: “There are people that don’t have phones to be online. You have to have a place where people can go to look for resources” (Waterbury, 34:39).

2025: “So if **the children who speak English are falling behind, imagine the ones who don’t speak English**. The ones whose parents also don’t speak English” (Manchester, 14:54).

Language access remains insufficient, especially in education and healthcare. The language barrier further restricts access to information and community resources, other main themes from the listening sessions.

3. Inaccessibility of Resources and Housing

Both years highlight severe housing cost burdens, poor living conditions, and barriers to stable housing.

2024: “The biggest concern right now is **the increase in rent**, the **terrible conditions** that most of us live in, for what we pay. I think rats live better ... It's unfair, you pay \$1,500 for it ... And it's full of mold” (Hartford, 31:50).

2025: “The **rent has risen** in a way that you **can’t pause to breathe**” (Manchester, 20:07).

New or Evolving Challenges in 2025

While many of the structural concerns identified in 2024 remain urgent, the 2025 Summit revealed several new or significantly evolving policy challenges:

1. Digital Inclusion and AI Equity

In 2025, artificial intelligence emerged as an increasingly novel challenge due to the rapid evolution of AI in the past year. This year’s discussions highlighted the rapid expansion of AI in public services, workforce development, and information access. Panelists emphasized that Latino communities face widening digital and algorithmic disparities, especially in broadband access, AI literacy, and representation in emerging technologies. Latino workers are disproportionately concentrated in occupations at high risk of automation, meaning AI-driven restructuring is more likely to displace Latino workers than other groups (Galdámez et al., 2025). The computational performance of leading

AI supercomputers has more than doubled annually since 2019, suggesting that trends of workforce displacement are likely to continue accelerating (Pilz et al., 2025).

2. Higher Education as a Distinct Policy Crisis

While education was discussed in 2024, in 2025 higher education has become its own standalone crisis due to federal funding threats. The urgency around student housing, food insecurity, and instability across Connecticut's colleges and universities was notably sharper than in previous years. Although Latino higher education attainment has risen modestly over the past two decades, Latinos continue to have the lowest per capita enrollment rates in Connecticut (Palomino & Venator-Santiago, pg 18).

3. Youth Civic Engagement as a Rising Priority

Listening sessions and the Civic Power panel both reflected a heightened emphasis on engaging Latino youth early and consistently in civic life. Latino residents in Connecticut are stressing the need for leadership pipelines, accessible civic education, and strategies for sustaining generational transitions in community advocacy. In June 2025, 59% of Latino residents in the Greater Hartford region expressed interest in at least one civic issue in their community (Palomino & Venator-Santiago, pg 6).

These shifts suggest that while longstanding issues persist, Connecticut's Latino communities are also confronting a rapidly changing technological and economic landscape, requiring new strategies and policy interventions in 2025.

Conclusions

The 2025 Charting Our Path Summit reaffirmed that Connecticut's Latino communities are not passive recipients of policy but active co-authors of the state's future. Through rigorous listening, data analysis, and legislative dialogue, this summit advanced a policy agenda rooted in equity, representation, and accountability.

As the state prepares for the 2026 legislative session, the recommendations emerging from this summit—particularly those related to housing, education, healthcare, food access, environmental justice, and civic engagement—present a clear opportunity for transformative, bipartisan action. These priorities are not only achievable but essential for building a Connecticut where every resident has the chance to thrive.

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