

# The LATINO EDUCATION TASK FORCE

February 22, 2021

VIA Electronic Mail

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Re: Latino Education Task Force Letter in Support of Senate Bill 135, New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship

Dear Senator O'Neill, Representative Garratt, Acting Secretary Rodríguez and Deputy Secretary Trujillo:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Latino Education Task Force. As a non-profit community organization, we worked closely with our communities statewide and across ethnic groups to organize forums on the education of our children and youth in 2009. We used what we learned to create the Hispanic Education Act in 2010 with Representative Rick Miera. Then in 2011, we started organizing the Martinez lawsuit, working closely with the courageous families and children who were the plaintiffs and with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). The youngest plaintiff is currently a senior in high school. The students involved in forums in 2009 have mostly found their paths in college-to-careers or the military. Many of their friends were not so lucky. I write today in support of Senate Bill 135. I am the president of the Latino Education Task Force and one of the directors of the board who are all fully dedicated to public education in New Mexico.

*Martinez v. New Mexico* focused on the education of children aged PreK-12. The Court ruled that our state had failed to provide a sufficient education and prepare our children to be college and career-ready. It has become very clear that our state needs the kind of support you are proposing for our students. We agree fully with you that supporting students to succeed now is an investment for the future of our

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families, communities and state. Research clearly shows that the higher level of completion of higher education for our students, the higher their income. Naturally, this also translates into tax and revenue consequences for our state.

Research also shows that the greatest hindrance and barrier for students of color to post-secondary education is lack of funds for tuition, fees and other costs involved. This is especially true for Latino and Native American students, and students in poverty, the plaintiffs in the Martinez lawsuit. Combined with Black and Asian students, they are over 72% of our public-school student population. Most New Mexicans know that our state ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation in public education. The opportunity scholarships in your bill would give our students and families what education researcher Dr. Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade calls “Audacious Hope”.

The options you are incorporating in SB 135 provide flexibility to the many lifestyles, goals and needs of our diverse communities. We appreciate the ways you are considering students who lost their lottery scholarship, often due to unforeseen circumstances. We appreciate the many situations you have considered, knowing the needs of our students and placing their needs in the center. Your bill helps us as New Mexicans do our part to support the success of scholarship students. We thank you and fully support your bill.

Sincerely,



Diane Torres-Velásquez Ph.D.

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