

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

HOUSE RESOLUTION

PROCLAIMING SEPTEMBER OF 2023 AS "LATINO HISTORY MONTH" IN THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Introduced By: Representatives Sanchez, Morales, Alzate, Giraldo, Diaz, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Chippendale, Felix, and Batista

Date Introduced: June 15, 2023

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, Latino History Month provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the  
2 common humanity underlying all people and to raise awareness and foster respect for the heritage  
3 and contributions of people of Latin-American and Caribbean descent; and

4 WHEREAS, American Hispanic/Latino history is rich, diverse and long, with  
5 immigrants, refugees and Spanish-speaking or indigenous people living in the United States since  
6 long before the nation was established; and

7 WHEREAS, Bringing with them traditions and culture from Mexico, Spain, Puerto Rico,  
8 the Dominican Republic and other Latin American and Iberian nations, America's Hispanic  
9 population continues to grow, reaching a record 62.5 million in 2020, or 18.7 percent of the  
10 United States population. From early Spanish colonialism, to civil and worker rights laws, to  
11 famous firsts, to recent Supreme Court decisions, many notable events in United States Hispanic  
12 and Latino History have occurred; and

13 WHEREAS, Thirty-six percent of residents in Rhode Island are Latin-American people  
14 of color, including several racial and ethnic groups. The Latino population is mainly of  
15 Dominican and Puerto Rican background, followed by Guatemalan, Mexican, and Colombian;  
16 and

17 WHEREAS, The 2020 Census shows the Latino American population of Rhode Island  
18 has reached 182,101, or 39.4 percent of the Rhode Island population; and

19 WHEREAS, In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson signed a bill designating the week of

1 September 15 as “National Hispanic Heritage Week”; and

2 WHEREAS, In 1988, Rhode Island Latino Arts launched the first statewide recognition  
3 and celebration of “National Hispanic Heritage Week”, and since then the State and its residents  
4 have recognized Hispanic Heritage Week and Hispanic Heritage Month, and have continued to  
5 celebrate Latin American ethnic and racial diversity that enriches and strengthens our nation; and

6 WHEREAS, In 2023, Rhode Island Latino Arts and Hispanic Heritage Month will  
7 celebrate 30 years in the State of Rhode Island; and

8 WHEREAS, The contributions of Hispanics and Latinos to the United States are long and  
9 storied, and history shows that the first known colony in America was not Jamestown, but the  
10 Spanish colony of St. Augustine in Florida; and

11 WHEREAS, Latinos are Americans and they form an indelible part of the American  
12 fabric; and

13 WHEREAS, People of Latin-American descent have participated in every aspect of  
14 America’s effort to secure, protect, and advance the cause of freedom and civil rights, and have  
15 stories that are an inspiration to all citizens, that reflect the triumph of the human spirit, and that  
16 offer everyday people the hope of rising above both prejudice and circumstance to build lives of  
17 human dignity; and

18 WHEREAS, People of Latin-American descent or Latin-American Americans have made  
19 measurable differences in Rhode Island, in their communities and respective industries and  
20 professions, such as:

21 1. Cecilia Rodriguez Saglio from Argentina, who helped found and became the President  
22 of El Club Panamericano, a group of Spanish-speaking individuals at the International Institute of  
23 Rhode Island, in the early 1940s, through this group, she helped connect the few Spanish-  
24 speaking professionals who were studying or chose Rhode Island as their home in the 1940s and  
25 1950s;

26 2. The Ortega brothers, Zanoni and Gimel, who moved to Rhode Island from Mexico in  
27 the late 1940s and became physicians at Roger Williams Hospital in Providence. The Ortegas  
28 were the first Mexican family to settle in Rhode Island and lived here for the next five decades;

29 3. Dr. Dario Herrera from Argentina, who moved to Rhode Island in 1954 for a job as a  
30 cardiologist at St. Joseph’s Hospital and the Hindle Memorial Clinic in South Providence. Dr.  
31 Herera is an avid runner who founded the Ocean State Marathon in 1977 and later became  
32 medical advisor to John Treacy of Providence College, who went on to win a Silver Medal in the  
33 marathon at the 1984 Olympics;

34 4. Josefina “Dona Fefa” and Antonio Rosario, from the Dominican Republic and Puerto

1 Rico respectively, who opened and were co-owners of Fefa's (Restaurant) Market, located on  
2 Broad Street in Providence, which was the first Dominican bodega in the State of Rhode Island.  
3 Additionally, the Rosarios were instrumental in establishing the first Dominican enclave in South  
4 Providence during the 1960s and 1970s,

5 5. Gustavo Carreno, Horacio Gill and Valentin Rios, the first three Colombians to arrive  
6 in Central Falls in 1964, to work at Lyon Fabrics;

7 6. Osvaldo "Ozzie" Castillo, originally from Puerto Rico, who became the first Hispanic  
8 Police Officer in Providence in 1974;

9 7. Jose Gonzalez, a Puerto Rican who, with his brother Roberto, co-founded the first  
10 Latin American Student Organization (LASO) on the campus of Rhode Island College in 1972;

11 8. Victor Mendoza, from the Dominican Republic, who founded the Hispanic Cultural  
12 Arts Committee and who organized the first Latin American Festival of Music, held at the  
13 Temple to Music in Roger Williams Park in 1979, an event that attracts close to 20,000 people;  
14 and

15 9. Roberto Gonzalez, who was the first Latino appointed to the Providence School Board  
16 by Mayor Cianci. He was also subsequently elected as the first Hispanic delegate to the Rhode  
17 Island Constitutional Convention, and later became the first Latino Judge in Rhode Island,  
18 appointed to serve on the Providence Housing Court in 1994;

19 10. Marta V. Martinez, a Mexican/Chicana, who founded the Hispanic Heritage  
20 Committee of Rhode Island and Rhode Island Latino Arts in 1988, and with a seed grant from the  
21 Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, organized the first celebration of Hispanic Heritage  
22 week. In 1991, the celebration became Hispanic Heritage Month, a 30-day statewide event. In  
23 2023, Hispanic Heritage Month and Rhode Island Latino Arts will together celebrate their 35th  
24 Anniversary;

25 11. Anastasia Williams, a Panamanian-American who became the first Hispanic in Rhode  
26 Island to be elected to a statewide office as a State Representative from District 9 in Providence;

27 12. Luis Aponte, The first Latino and Puerto Rican to win a seat on the Providence City  
28 Council, in 1998;

29 13. Grace Diaz, the first Latina to represent District 11 in Providence, in 2004. She is the  
30 first Dominican-American Latina elected to State Office in the history of the United States;

31 14. Angel Taveras, a Dominican-American who became the first Latino Mayor of  
32 Providence in 2011. He is also the third elected and fourth serving Dominican-American Mayor  
33 in the United States;

34 15. James Diossa, a Colombian-American, who was the first Latino Mayor of Central

1 Falls, and is also the first Colombian-American Mayor elected in the United States; and

2 16. Nellie Gorbea, the first Latina and Puerto Rican to be elected as the Secretary of State  
3 of Rhode Island. She is also the first Hispanic to win statewide office in New England, and the  
4 first to run for Governor; now, therefore be it

5 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby  
6 proclaims September of 2023 as “Latino History Month” in the State of Rhode Island, recognizes  
7 the 35th Anniversary of Rhode Island Latino Arts and Hispanic Heritage Month, and extends  
8 appreciation to the aforementioned persons for their contributions to the State of Rhode Island  
9 and our Nation; and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
11 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Ms. Marta Martinez, Executive Director,  
12 Rhode Island Latino Arts.

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