Approved March 11, 2014

**Montgomery County Executive’s Latin American Advisory Group (LAAG)**

**Minutes for January 22, 2014**

Place: CAO Conference Room, Executive Office Building, Rockville, MD

Attendees: County Executive Ike Leggett; LAAG Chair Teresa Chapa; Mayra Bayonet; Mayra Breton; Oscar Buitrago; Manny Hidalgo; Cesar Lopez; Milagros McGuire; Henry Montes; Carlos Moya; Cecilia Otero; Maria Peña-Faustino; Antonio Tijerino; Lorna Virgili; Carmen Delgado-Votaw; and Teresa Wright.

Honored Guest: Karla Silvestre, Director of Community Engagement, Montgomery College

Staff: Bruce Adams, Office of Community Partnerships

Prior to the meeting, County Executive Ike Leggett joined with LAAG members, members of the Morazan, El Salvador Sister City Committee, COTSA (Comunidades Transnacionales Salvadoreñas Americanas), Welcoming America, County staff colleagues, and friends to honor Karla Silvestre for five years of outstanding service to Montgomery County as the Latino liaison. Karla is now serving as Director of Community Engagement at Montgomery College.

The meeting began at 6 p.m. with a welcome by co-chair Teresa Chapa.

Remarks by County Executive Ike Leggett

County Executive Ike Leggett began the meeting with an overview of the budget and fiscal situation as he begins preparation of the FY2015 operating budget for submission to the County Council in March. He stated that the fiscal situation is better than in recent years, but he noted the need to be cautious because of the uncertainty caused by possible action by the Maryland General Assembly, a lawsuit pending at the state level that could have a negative impact on local governments, and the unpredictability of Congress. The County Executive explained that he had submitted his FY2015-20 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) to the County Council: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/FY15/ciprec/index.html>. He noted that the CIP reflects the need to respond to a huge increase in the number of students in MCPS. He said that he included a large increase in funding for the Housing Initiative Fund, and that his administration is concentrating on affordable housing for seniors. In addition to affordable housing, the County Executive pointed to increased investment in language access, Gilchrist Center, and after-school programs and recreation facilities for youth. He highlighted several important goals in the upcoming budgets including after-school programs in every middle school and greater diversity in the middle management of the County government workforce.

Advisory group co-chair Teresa Chapa referenced the January 10, 2014 letter from the LAAG to the County Executive laying out the advisory group’s budget priorities for FY2015 (letter is attached).  
  
Ensure Affordable Housing for Latino Residents

In response to the County Executive’s discussion of affordable housing, Mayra Bayonet expressed support for increasing funding and programming to create affordable housing -- providing options for various types of housing, including accessory dwelling units (accessory apartments), Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDU), and Workforce Housing programs.

Expand the Latino Workforce in Montgomery County Government

Henry Montes reminded the County Executive of the LAAG’s longstanding advocacy for increased Latino representation in the Montgomery County Government workforce. Montes noted that Latinos continue to be underrepresented in manager positions and referenced a January 9, 2007 memorandum from Joe Adler, director of the Office of Human Resources, to Chief Administrative Officer Tim Firestine outlining the actions needed to implement the recommendations of a task force chartered to achieve an inclusive County workforce for responsive County service delivery (copy attached).

County Executive Leggett responded by explaining that the County has reduced its workforce by 10% in response to the recession. He said he has made a priority of diversifying the police force. He agreed that diversifying middle management must be a top priority as that is where there is great discretion on important matters such as contracts. The County Executive noted that it will require a great number of changes in current personnel rules and regulations. Carmen Delgado-Votaw said that it will take use of the County Executive’s Bully Pulpit to hire a more diverse workforce.

Increase Funding for Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity

Teresa Chapa noted that the Gilchrist Center served 23,000 residents but that this is but the tip of the iceberg of immigrants needing services. Karla Silvestre said that the Gilchrist Center is seen as a welcoming place for many immigrants who would not naturally turn to government for help. County Executive Leggett said that he is working to expand staffing and increase funding. He noted that the new Gaithersburg Library includes a suite of Gilchrist Center offices and classrooms. Last year, he added $100,000 to fund MCAEL (Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy). Teresa Wright noted the robust MCAEL funding of programs at Watkins Mill High School. Mayra Bayonet suggested creating a welcome package for new immigrants.

Support Funding for Latino Health Issues

Henry Montes spoke of Health & Human Services’ new Leadership Institute for Equity and Eliminating Disparities (LIEED) and its role in promoting a holistic view of health needs. Montes pointed to the important work of the Welcome Back Centers in credentialing people who had health worker credentials in their native countries. He stated that implementation of the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) will require more Spanish speaking navigators. Lorna Virgili said we need to do more outreach. Navigators are needed as it is still too hard to register on-line.

Support Business Development Services to Latino Businesses

Lorna Virgili advocated support for the groups that help Latino small businesses. County Executive Leggett said we need to revamp the small business incubator program.

Support Sports, Recreational, and Job Readiness Programs for Latino Youth

Cecilia Otero stated that we need to have more after-school programs where the Latino youth are. County Executive Leggett pointed to new White Oak and Mid-County recreation centers. He said that Wheaton will have a combined recreation center/library/Gilchrist Center. He said his goal is to have an after-school program in every middle school. We have developed the models; now we need the funding. The County Executive said we need to get more kids in summer camps. He also pointed out a new transportation initiative to help seniors get to senior and recreation centers.

Next Steps for LAAG

At the conclusion of the conversation with the County Executive, co-chair Teresa Chapa asked LAAG members to suggest next steps.

Henry Montes said the LAAG should ask OMB to explain how LAAG priorities fare in the approved FY15 budget. Teresa Chapa agreed, saying we need to show results for the issues LAAG has supported. Karla Silvestre suggested inviting the departmental directors to report on what they are doing for Latinos. Carmen Delgado-Votaw said we need a chart on hiring – who applied? who was hired?

The members discussed which two directors to invite to the next LAAG meeting on March 11, 2014. They agreed on the top three priorities -- Human Resources, Economic Development, and Housing and Community Affairs. Carmen Delgado-Votaw recommended that LAAG send questions to the directors prior to the meetings. Henry Montes volunteered to draft questions for Human Resources. Lorna Virgilia, Cesar Lopez, and Carmen Larsen were asked to draft questions for Economic Development.

Carmen Delgado-Votaw recommended that LAAG meet with the other ethnic advisory groups to the County Executive periodically. Bruce Adams of the Office of Community Partnerships said that is under discussion by the group working on follow-up to the 2012 Diversity Summit. Questions were asked about what each group would get out of multicultural meetings. Karla Silvestre observed that the Gilchrist Center needs an advisory group made up of native and foreign born to advocate for the Center. Henry Montes said the LAAG letter should be shared with the other advisory groups.

Milagros McGuire pointed out that the public safety group has led to positive results. She suggested getting a report from that group. She said she wants to hear more about what LAAG’s advocacy has accomplished. She pointed to the funding of Dreamers at Montgomery College.

Bruce Adams of the Office of Community Partnerships reminded members that the next LAAG meeting will take place on March 11, 2014 and asked members to spread the word about the job opening to replace Karla Silvestre as Latino liaison. Applications are due by January 31. Teresa Chapa will represent the LAAG on the interview panel.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Minutes prepared by:

Bruce Adams, Office of Community Partnerships

NOTE: These minutes were approved by the LAAG at its March 11, 2014 meeting.