



ALLIANCE FOR PUERTO RICAN EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

February 09th, 2021

Hon. Chancellor Matos-Rodriguez:

President Jennifer Raab:

Firstly, Chancellor Matos Rodriguez, the Alliance of Puerto Education and Empowerment (APREE) would first like to convey our best regards and our collective pride in your continuing leadership as Chancellor of the City University of New York, as well as your endeavors to champion the needs of the diverse CUNY student body. For these reasons, we would like to raise an issue of significant importance to Puerto Rican students, faculty, staff, and the community at large, both in New York and beyond. Secondly, President Raab, we appreciate the assurances you conveyed in your message to the community on the bright future we can all expect El Centro to enjoy.

The impending change in administration at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies presents the community of scholars, faculty, and community end users with an opportune moment to revisit the standing in CUNY of this prestigious and singular research facility. Scholarship in Puerto Rican Studies at CUNY has matured to a level over the past forty-seven years that an examination of *where we have been and where we wish to go*, if you will, is warranted at this juncture — as any seismic change in administration would.

With its beginning at CUNY/Brooklyn College in 1973, to Dr. Josephine Nieves (1st Director of Puerto Studies in Brooklyn College) recruiting Dr. Frank Bonilla from California, to head El Centro; to its location at the Hunter College 68th Street Campus; to being hosted at the prestigious Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work in El Barrio (an eloquent positioning of El Centro), an examination of El Centro is well warranted at this time. El Centro's a long and reputable history and has become a highly regarded locus of research, scholarship and empowerment for CUNY students, faculty, professional staff, and the larger community. Its accomplishments are noteworthy for its influence domestically, nationally, and Puerto Rico. As Hunter College has gained a leading position in the myriad of CUNY campuses, an academic audit of El Centro, with an eye on the future, would be a welcome and invaluable instrument in curriculum design, with respect to Puerto Rican/Latin@ Studies.

Needless to say, as a previous Director of El Centro, you are aware of El Centro's legacy, value and importance to the preservation of Puerto Rican history, education, and culture.



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Although we recognize that CUNY is encountering fiscal restraints, we nevertheless believe that ethnic/racial studies, and specifically El Centro should not be casualties of these circumstances. This historic moment requires that El Centro and comparable institutions remain viable to serve as vehicles by which research, education and service are carried out to confront and challenge the ignorance that has produced racism and marginalization of communities of color. If there were ever a time when El Centro and other ethnic/racial studies were essential, it is now.

The COVID Pandemic coupled with an adverse administration, has clearly cut out your work for you in the near term. A dialogue with the Puerto Rican academic leadership in CUNY would go a long way to supporting your advocacy for funding for CUNY with the new administration, which we expect, with good reason, will be open to progressive educational programming and expansion.

Issues of concern for our conversation with you would include these, among other themes:

- Preserving and sustaining autonomy and fiscal integrity of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College;
- Steps to assure that El Centro director be replaced by a strong, competent director, and inclusion of key stakeholders from within and outside of CUNY.

The Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment's (APREE) position is that as CUNY Chancellor, it is within your authority, and that of the CUNY Board of Trustees, to take-action to mitigate the injustice and potential harm to El Centro and the larger Puerto Rican community. We are prepared to meet with you to discuss the manner by which you can assure the continuity and sustainability of El Centro at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,

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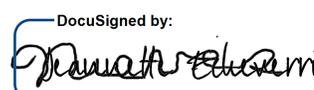
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