

**U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS HEARINGS
ON MOUNT PLEASANT**

Testimony Presented on Behalf of ENLACE, The D.C. Metropolitan
Coalition of Latina/o Lesbians and Gay Men.
January 29, 1992

INTRODUCTION

ENLACE is the D.C. Metropolitan Coalition of Latino Lesbians and Gay Men. Our organization has members from almost every Latin American and Caribbean country represented in D.C. ENLACE was established in 1987 for the purpose of promoting pride in our identity as Latino gay men and lesbians. Since 1987, ENLACE has worked to encourage this sense of pride through educational and social activities which reinforce our cultura. We have sought to empower ourselves by developing leadership among us and advocating for our rights in the community.

Through its members, ENLACE, has participated in various gay and lesbian and Latino community groups. Members participate in the D.C. Latino Civil Rights Task Force, on the housing and education committees and ENLACE was one of the first groups to hold a fundraiser for the Task Force. ENLACE has also participated in the coalition which advocates for the Domestic Partnership legislation which we believe validates our definition of "family".

In short, we are committed to our goal of being proud of being gay and lesbian in the Latino community, Latino in the gay and lesbian community and advocating for human rights.

POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Background

Of the approximately 128,800 Latinos living in the District of Columbia it can be estimated that 10 percent are gay and lesbian Latinos (based on the Kinsey Institute's estimation of the percentage of a population that is homosexual). This part of the Latino community is subject to the double discrimination for being gay or lesbian and Latino.

Since the riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, which were prompted by harassment of New York police toward Latino and Black gays and lesbians, Latino gay men and lesbians have been involved in the human rights movement. This has included sensitizing police to the rights of gay men and lesbians.

The Riots in Mount Pleasant

The riots of last May were spurred by a now well-publicized incident between a Latino man and a non-Latino police officer. Many incidents between police officers and gay men and lesbian Latinos go unpublicized. While we do not have statistics on the number of adverse incidents between D.C. police and gay and lesbian Latinos, we do want the Commission to consider the following:

For example, we have an allegation that was reported to ENLACE of harrasment by an off-duty police officer of gay Latino man at his job. The person fears retribution and refused to report it through official channels.

The problem with gathering statistics of these incidents is one of under-reporting, because of fear of retribution for being gay and Latino, language barriers, and immigration status.

Recommendation

ENLACE has participated in the work of two groups, the D.C. Latino Civil Rights Task Force and Gays and Lesbian Opposing Violence. We support the efforts in the Latino and gay and lesbian community to sensitize police officers to the Latino residents of the District of Columbia, as well as, the gay and lesbian residents of the District of Columbia.

PROVISION OF SERVICES TO THE LATINO COMMUNITY

Health Services - AIDS/HIV

As of December 1991, there were 3,357 adult AIDS cases reported in the District of Columbia. Of the reported AIDS cases among Latino men, 90% are gay or bisexual men which is higher than the national percentage of 61% gay and bisexual men.

AIDS/HIV education and prevention services are inadequate for the growing Latino population. There are currently two positions for health educators that are funded by the District of Columbia. Two people for 129,800 Latino residents! The Commission of Public Health has one person that is designated to work on AIDS/HIV education and prevention in the Latino community. There is no AIDS hotline in Spanish in the District of Columbia. The District has understaffed AIDS education and prevention efforts for the Latino community.

Latino community-based organizations that provide HIV/AIDS services to the Latino community are not supported by the District of Columbia. The two health educators mentioned previously work for non-Latino agencies, ALIANZA, a project of a for profit organization, KOBA, Inc. and the Whitman-Walker Clinic. The only

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CLOSING STATEMENT

The riots of last May were an expression of the anger and frustration over the daily discrimination and violence that exists against Latinos in the District of Columbia. The riots were also a clear indication, like the riots of Stonewall, that our community is unwilling to endure further discrimination and poor treatment.

We believe that the riots planted the seeds of renewed commitment to a movement that asserts our pride in our heritage and the contributions we make to the District of Columbia.

Since last May, ENLACE has participated in the process of transforming this negative situation into positive outcomes. In all the areas of concern, we are not only seeking to sensitize non-Latinos to the issues of the Latino community, but also to fight for parity in service and treatment. Finally, we seek our proportionate share of services, but not at the expense of other members of our community.