



MINNESOTA

COUNCIL ON
LATINO AFFAIRS

ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2025

LEGISLATIVE REPORT AS REQUESTED
BY MINNESOTA STATUTE 15.0145



✓ ADVISE ✓ INFLUENCE ✓ CONNECT

47 Years of Service

OUR MISSION

The Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (MCLA) is a state agency in the Executive Branch entrusted to advise, inform, influence, and connect in a non-partisan way to improve the lives of Latino Minnesotans.

OUR VISION

Powerful and diverse voices drive policy and systems change that is equitable and improves the lives of Minnesotans of Latin American and Caribbean descent.

OUR VALUES

Voice.
Quality of Life.
Democracy.
Presence.
Linkage.
Mutual Prosperity.
Inclusive and Anti-Racist.



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The Council **advises** and **works** with the **legislature** and the **Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor** towards the **implementation** of the **economic, social, legal, and political equality** for **Minnesotans of Latino heritage** (Minn. Stat. 15.0145)

LETTER FROM THE COUNCIL'S CHAIR

Dear members of the Minnesota State Legislature,

On behalf of the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (MCLA) Board of Directors and staff, I am honored to present the 2025 MCLA Annual Report. This report describes the Council's statutory advisory work, policy engagement, and recommendations to the Executive Branch, the Legislature, and state agencies over the past year. This report reflects a year of continued advocacy, partnership, and service to ensure that the voices, experiences, and contributions of Minnesota's Latinos, Latinas, Latine/xs of Latin American and Caribbean descent are meaningfully represented in state government and public policy decision-making.

Throughout 2025, MCLA focused on its statutory role as a non-partisan state agency and advisory body to the Governor, Legislature, and state agencies, as outlined in Minnesota Statutes. The Council focused on ensuring that policy development and implementation aligned with Minnesota's goals of fairness, equity, and inclusivity and were informed by the experiences of Latino communities, organizations, individuals, and families.

In a year shaped by both opportunity and significant challenges—particularly for immigrant and refugee communities, the Council focused on ensuring that state policy conversations reflected the current realities and priorities of Latino Minnesotans. The Council elevated community-identified experiences, and strengthened ties between state leaders and Latino serving organizations and communities.

This year marked important progress. During the 2025 legislative session, MCLA provided policy advice, written statements, and informational briefings to legislators and committees, brought together people from the community to participate in listening sessions, and shared data-informed recommendations to inform legislative deliberations and executive decision-making.

The Council, in partnership with staff leadership and community stakeholders, helped move forward conversations about important issues for Latino Minnesotans.

Key areas of focus included economic development and workforce, education access and student success, small

business development, language access and culturally responsive services, health equity, public safety, and civic participation. MCLA also kept track of bills and new laws, responding to legislation that disproportionately impacts immigrant and mixed-status families, providing timely analysis and recommendations to decision-makers. The Council continued strengthening relationships with policymakers and state agencies and establishing mutually beneficial relationships with community-based organizations to ensure that policy decisions are guided by real-life stories and facts.

I want to recognize the dedication of MCLA staff, whose work ensured timely legislative analysis, effective agency coordination, and strengthened inter-agency relationships.



Additionally, I want to recognize the leadership of former Executive Director Rosa Tock and wish her well in retirement. I am also pleased to share that Sonia Reyes has been appointed Executive Director, and I am confident that her leadership will continue to advance the Council's mission. I also extend sincere appreciation to my fellow board members for their service and commitment.

As Minnesota's Latino population continues to grow and diversify, MCLA's role as a bridge between government and Latino Minnesotans is more important than ever. The Board is especially proud of the Council's 2025 efforts to provide policymakers and state agencies information and data grounded in Latino community voices, promoting inclusive laws and policies while collaborating with partner state councils and community organizations to help create inclusive and equitable policy outcomes. Looking ahead, the Board remains committed to strategic priorities that advance equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all Minnesotans while upholding transparency, accountability, and collaboration in our work.

Thank you for your leadership and partnership in helping Minnesota govern effectively, equitably, and inclusively for Minnesotans of Latin American and Caribbean descent. We invite you to review this report and to continue engaging with MCLA as a trusted partner in the year ahead.

With respect and gratitude,

Dr. Ronald Salazar
Chair, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Minnesota legislative session began with unprecedented challenges, including an evenly divided House of Representatives following the 2024 election. For the first time in nearly five decades, the House opened the session with a 67–67 split between Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) and Republican (GOP) members. A subsequent residency determination vacated a DFL seat, triggering a special election and resulting in a temporary 67–66 Republican advantage. This dynamic led to a delayed start of legislative business, with DFL members withholding attendance to prevent a quorum until a power-sharing agreement was reached.

Following the March special election, Representative David Gottfried (DFL–Roseville) won District 40, restoring the tie. Under the power-sharing agreement, committees were co-chaired by both parties with equal membership. Representative Lisa Demuth (R–Cold Spring) was elected Speaker of the House for the 2025–2026 biennium, becoming the first woman of color to hold the position.

Despite political division, lawmakers reached a bipartisan agreement on a \$66 billion two-year state budget—approximately \$5 billion less than the previous cycle—and passed a \$700 million bonding bill supporting state preservation, water infrastructure, housing, and other critical investments. These agreements concluded during a 16-hour special session on June 9. While the budget ensured continuity of government operations, it included difficult compromises that disproportionately impacted Latino communities.

One of the most consequential decisions was the elimination of MinnesotaCare eligibility for undocumented adults. Framed as a cost-saving measure, this policy change sparked significant concern among advocates, public health experts, and community members. Removing access to preventive care is expected to worsen health outcomes and increase long-term health care costs. Undocumented children remain eligible for coverage.

This report outlines MCLA’s legislative priorities, policy engagement, and advocacy during the 2025 session, with a focus on the impacts to Minnesota’s Latino communities. The tragic assassination of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark occurred after the close of session and falls outside the scope of policy analysis; however, their loss profoundly affected the state. Speaker Emerita Hortman’s leadership and commitment to equity continue to shape Minnesota’s legislative legacy.



2025 MAIN GOALS AND HIGHLIGHTS

As a small-staffed and efficient state agency, MCLA prioritizes its work through a three-pronged approach:



1 ADVISE

The primary purpose of MCLA is to provide non-partisan, fact-based analysis and advise the State of Minnesota on issues impacting Latino communities. During the 2025 legislative session, MCLA staff worked across state agencies, legislative offices, community organizations, and coalitions to identify priorities, draft and review legislation, submit formal letters, and provide testimony.

In 2025, MCLA supported 9 bills, opposed 2 bills, and monitored over 50 bills total. Staff drafted legislation in collaboration with legislative authors, delivered testimony during committee hearings, and provided technical assistance and policy analysis throughout the session.

List of key legislation supported or advanced in 2025:

- North Star Program Funding secured \$99 million each biennium to sustain the program. \$404,000 for program administration
- Spoken language health care interpreter workgroup established at the Minnesota Department of Health, \$265,000 secured for improved healthcare access for our Latino communities
- Technical assistance funding for innovative business development services through the Latino Economic Development Center (passed)
- New legislation and funding that support workers' rights: Starting Jan 1, 2026, workers will be entitled to rest and meal breaks, and the Department of Labor and Industry secured funding for the enforcement of legislation against the misclassification of workers as independent contractors (passed)

2025 MAIN GOALS AND HIGHLIGHTS

2 CONNECT

Minnesota Latino Leadership Alliance (MiLLA)

MiLLA continued to serve as a catalyst for collaboration among Latino-led organizations and leaders across Minnesota. In 2025, MiLLA convened partner organizations to analyze community needs survey results, identify shared legislative priorities, and develop a coordinated policy agenda for the 2026 session. MiLLA also expanded its digital presence by adopting social media platforms to increase visibility, outreach, and engagement with Latino communities statewide.

Latine Day at the Capitol

On April 24, 2025, MCLA hosted its annual Latine Day at the Capitol under the theme “Hope, Unity, and Action for a Better Future.” The event brought together community members, advocates, and legislators to uplift Latino voices, share lived experiences, and advocate for policies impacting education, health care, immigration, and economic stability. Participants engaged directly with policymakers and state agency representatives.

3 INFLUENCE

MCLA influenced policy through non-partisan research, policy analysis, legislative recaps, and public communications. In 2025, MCLA worked with the Governor’s Office and community partners to recognize Latine Heritage Month, Mes de la Herencia, Mexican Heritage Day, and Día de los Muertos. MCLA also collaborated with other Ethnic Councils to issue a joint statement urging state and local officials to protect immigrant and refugee communities and counter harmful rhetoric.



2025 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY PRIORITIES



LIFELONG LEARNING (K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION)

MCLA prioritized policies that promote educational equity, teacher diversity, and access to higher education. During the 2025 session, changes to the Education Policy and Appropriations Omnibus Bill streamlined grants supporting the Increase Teachers of Color Act (ITCA), which aims to increase teachers of color by 2% annually through 2040. However, funding reductions undermined some of these gains. The Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color (CUGMEC) program was cut by 20 percent, and funding for the Coalition of Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers was reduced by 50 percent.

Additional education wins included new requirements for school districts to engage parents of students with disabilities who do not speak English in the development of individualized education plans, using translated materials and interpretation services. In higher education, the North Star Promise program was preserved despite repeated attempts to restrict eligibility, particularly for undocumented students. MCLA opposed these efforts through letters of opposition and testimony.



HEALTH

Health policy was a central focus of the 2025 session. The most significant setback was the repeal of MinnesotaCare eligibility for undocumented adults through HF1/SF8 during the Special Session. MCLA strongly opposed this change, submitting multiple letters, coordinating advocacy with other Ethnic Councils, and engaging public discourse to counter misinformation. While undocumented children remain eligible, adults enrolled in the program will lose coverage beginning January 1, 2026.

Other health-related outcomes included the elimination of long-COVID grant funding and the passage of reforms to expand Minnesota's health care workforce by easing licensing barriers for foreign-born professionals. The legislature also created a spoken language health care interpreter workgroup with one-time funding to improve access to care for non-English speakers—an initiative MCLA supported through testimony.

2025 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY PRIORITIES



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The state passed a major budget and jobs law in 2025 that allocates roughly \$460 million over the 2026–27 biennium for economic development, jobs, labor, and industry programs. A significant portion of that — including over \$92 million — is directed toward workforce development services, distributed via grants (often in the \$500,000–\$1.5M range) to community organizations. Under the law, smaller businesses that historically couldn’t access certain state support systems are now eligible for a renamed and expanded small-business program (now called “Made in Minnesota”).

The Jobs, Labor, and Economic Development Omnibus Bill included several provisions affecting Latino workers and families. Legislation against misclassification of workers (when employers falsely label employees as independent contractors to avoid labor protections) is already in place. But in the 2025 session, funding has been allocated for the first time for the enforcement of these provisions, in addition to the continuation of funding for the enforcement of earned sick and safe time, wage theft, prevailing wages, and safe workplaces for meat and food processing workers.

Affordable housing investments supported first-generation homebuyers, preserved affordable rental housing, and established a common interest community ombudsperson within the Department of Commerce. New worker protections regarding rest and meal breaks were also enacted. However, MCLA-supported proposals—including a low-cost car insurance program and an ombudsperson for agricultural and food processing workers—did not pass.



IMMIGRATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY

MCLA opposed legislation that would have required local governments to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. This proposal did not advance, preserving local authority and trust between immigrant communities and public institutions. MCLA submitted testimony and formal opposition letters, including opposition to HF16.

2025 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY PRIORITIES



INVESTING IN THE LATINO COMMUNITY

Among some of the wins this session, several Latino-led organizations received important investments totaling at least \$5.8 million that will help strengthen Minnesota's Latino communities: Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES), Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Política (COPAL), the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC), and NeoMuralismos de México en Minnesota.

ORGANIZATION	FUNDING AMOUNT	FOCUS AREA	IMPACT ON LATINO COMMUNITIES IN MINNESOTA
CLUES	\$2 Million (FY26–27) – one-time appropriation	Workforce Development	A grant to address employment, economic, and technology access disparities for low-income unemployed or underemployed individuals. Grant money must support short-term certifications and transferable skills in high-demand fields, workforce readiness, customized financial capability, and employment supports.
CLUES	\$1.75 Million (FY26-27)	Workforce Development Services	Appropriation to address employment, economic, and technology access disparities for low-income unemployed or underemployed adult individuals.
COPAL	\$500,000 (FY26-27)	Workforce Development Services	A grant for capacity building, career planning, GED attainment classes, educational resources and materials, health resources, training programs, and job navigation for adult individuals.
COPAL	\$1 Million (FY26-27) – one time appropriation –	Workforce Development Services	A grant for worker center programming that supports primarily low-income, migrant, and Latinx workers with career planning, workforce training and education, workers' rights advocacy, health resources and navigation, and wealth creation resources.
LEDC	\$500,000 (FY26-27)	Economic Development, Business Support	To assist, support, finance, and launch microentrepreneurs by delivering training, workshops, and one-on-one consultations to businesses; and to guide prospective entrepreneurs in their start-up process.
NeoMuralismos	\$100,000 (one year)	Arts and Culture	A grant that supports Latino artists and promotes cultural heritage through murals, increasing community pride and cultural visibility.

These organizations are trusted, with community-based leaders doing the everyday work of cultural preservation, economic advancement, and technical and vocational training. CLUES continues to serve as a cornerstone of support for Latino families with services that span from health and wellness to education and workforce development. COPAL was part of several efforts this session tied to workforce training,

2025 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY PRIORITIES

equitable health care access, and voter engagement—advocating for policies that give Latino communities more voice and opportunity. The organization helped secure funding for capacity building, career planning, GED attainment classes, educational resources and materials, health resources, training programs, and job navigation for adult individuals.

NeoMuralismos, a new cultural group dedicated to creating and telling the contemporary stories of Latinos through public art and murals, received a \$100,000 one-time investment to support Latino-centered art and cultural programming, an important win for visibility, representation, and community pride. The arts organization also pushed for funding to create the first Minnesota Latino Museum in the state. Although the bill was heard in an information committee, it did not advance this session.

LEDC secured appropriations for business support, including funding for Latino-owned commercial and agricultural businesses. This funding helps Latino entrepreneurs access technical assistance and grow their ventures in a sustainable way. Together, these investments show the state’s recognition of the power and impact of Latino-led organizations, and why continued, intentional funding is critical for building a more equitable and inclusive Minnesota.



2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

As part of MCLA's ongoing efforts to build relationships and maintain a presence outside the Twin Cities, MCLA conducted community engagement visits across Greater Minnesota between August and October 2025. Staff traveled to 11 cities across Greater Minnesota. These included Madelia, Mankato, Saint James, Faribault, Owatonna, Austin, Rochester, St. Cloud, Long Prairie, Worthington, and Willmar. During these visits, staff met directly with legislators, local officials, service providers, educators, and community members.

These visits included conversations with 12 legislators from both parties, the mayor of Rochester, and more than 40 community leaders working in areas of education, workforce development, higher education, social services, economic development, and immigration. Engagements were structured as listening-based conversations focused on understanding local conditions, identifying shared challenges, and elevating community-driven solutions for Minnesota Latinos.

Across all sites, education emerged as a central concern. Community members described lower high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates for Latino students and persistent language barriers that limit family engagement, among other inequities within school systems. Many noted that while schools are expanding outreach to immigrant and English learner families, staffing shortages and limited funding often constrain these efforts.

Health access was another consistent theme. Participants reported barriers related to affordability, lack of insurance, language access,

and navigating health systems. In rural communities, limited provider availability, long travel distances, and fear related to immigration enforcement have further restricted access to preventive and mental health care.

Economic challenges were widely discussed. Many Latino residents are concentrated in industries such as food processing, agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, which often offer lower wages and fewer benefits. Latino-owned businesses face difficulties accessing capital and local government programs. Housing affordability was identified as a significant issue, with families disproportionately sharing living spaces as a consequence of rising costs and limited availability. Childcare access and affordability were also cited as barriers to workforce participation.

Issues of immigration, belonging, and safety cut across nearly all conversations. Community members described more frequent experiences with discrimination and racial tension, as well as fear of interactions with

federal immigration enforcement authorities, which have reduced participation in schools, health systems, and civic life. These fears affect families regardless of immigration status and have implications for children's well-being and community trust in public institutions.

Despite these challenges, communities also highlighted local strengths. Schools, nonprofit organizations, and individual leaders often serve as trusted anchors, working to foster inclusion, support families, and strengthen local economies. Latino-owned businesses, cultural organizations, and community-based nonprofits play an especially important role in promoting belonging and opportunity in Greater Minnesota.

These visits emphasized the importance of active engagement beyond the Twin Cities and informed MCLA's understanding of both regional differences and shared priorities. The insights gathered continue to shape MCLA's policy recommendations and legislative priorities moving into the 2026 session.



2025 METRICS OF SUCCESS

LEGISLATION DRAFTED AND/OR COLLABORATED ON:

50+ Tracked bills; supported 9;
opposed 2; 3 passed

PUBLIC OUTREACH EVENTS:

20+ Community events
convened

MEETINGS WITH CONSTITUENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS:

25+ Meetings with legislators
and numerous meetings
with community leaders

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY / POSITION STATEMENTS:

Multiple committee
testimonies, formal letters, and
joint statements submitted

COMMUNICATIONS REACH:

17,000+ Monthly bilingual
newsletters
subscribers

LEGISLATIVE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Legislation Drafted and/or collaborated with Tracked 50+ bills:

- Supported 9
- Opposed 2
- 3 passed

Community Engagement

1. MiLLA retreat and end of session gathering with partnering Latino organizations partners
2. Meetings with Latino leaders to report back on areas of work and impact during this legislative session to address anti-immigrant legislation
3. Latine Day at the Capitol “Hope, Unity, and Action for a Better Future”, April 24, 2025
4. Bilingual 2025 Legislative Session Wrap-up Report
5. 2025 Legislative Session Wrap-up virtual event on June 24, 2025
6. Bilingual e-newsletters: 5
7. Latino Leaders Meetings (Office of Public Engagement and Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor)
8. External advisors’ meetings (Office of Public Engagement and Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor): 3

Outreach and Communications

Monthly newsletter: sharing legislative priorities and updates, resources, engagement and outreach opportunities and activities including events, celebrations, and opportunities for community learning

- 17,000+ subscribers

Legislative Advocacy Meetings

- 25+ meetings with legislators

Events Convened

- 20+ community events

Constituents reached through community conversations and survey, and engagement with agencies that serve Latino communities across the state.

A COMMUNITY-INFORMED APPROACH TO INFLUENCE POLICY AND LEGISLATION



1. RESEARCH, PUBLICATIONS, AND ANALYSIS

MCLA conducted research, performed analysis, and produced publications in 2025

- a. Community priorities reports
- b. Legislative Recaps
- c. Fact Sheets
- d. Proclamations
- e. Policy briefs
- f. Participatory research efforts

2. TASKFORCES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND COALITIONS

- a. Taskforces, Partnerships, and Coalitions are critical for MCLA to serve as a non-partisan partner to provide unbiased insight into broader Latino communities in Minnesota, deepening relationships and connection with other Latino leaders identifying and addressing unique challenges facing communities.
- b. MCLA also provided non-partisan data and advice to state agencies, including the

Minnesota Department of Education, Department of Employment and Economic Development, Department of Human Services, and Department of Transportation, and participated in interagency bodies such as the Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council, DHS legislative subcommittee, and MnDOT Corridor Planning Advisory Committee.

MCLA utilized participatory research principles to incorporate community input, with the intention of better informing policy and legislative advocacy. In collaboration with partner organizations and with support from Management Analysis and Development (MAD), MCLA designed and distributed a 48-item community needs survey, resulting in 253 responses from Minnesota Latinos. From this, respondents identified immigration, belonging, and cost-of-living as their most significant concerns. MCLA also convened listening sessions, roundtable discussions with English Learner parent groups and their schools, and a 2025 legislative session wrap-up town hall to gather feedback and report back to the community.

FY26 EXPENDITURES (AS OF DECEMBER 2025)

General Fund **\$491,002.78**

Expenditures

Full-Time \$228,624.96

Overtime and Premium Pay \$5,754.61

Other Employee Costs \$165.00

Space Rental and Utilities 10,015.00

Printing and Advertising..... \$754.44

Professional Technical Services.....\$1,838.80

Communications.....\$742.63

In-State Travel.....\$2,817.65

Out of State Travel \$0.00

Employee Development.....\$250.00

State Agency Prof Tech Services.....\$16,465.00

Central MNIT Service \$8,529.60

Agency Specific MNIT Services\$136.39

Supplies.....\$7,270.87

Equipment..... \$0.00

Other Operating Costs\$6,908.38

Equipment (noncapital).....\$292,623.06

TOTAL **\$242,972.04**

BOARD MEMBERS



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District 2 – Treasurer



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MARCO HERNANDEZ
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District 5B



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District 65B

STAFF MEMBERS (IP)



ROSA TOCK

Executive Director
(Retired November 2025)



SONIA REYES

Executive Director
Interim Appointment (working part-time) – October 27, 2025
Officially Appointed – January 29, 2026
Full Time Start Date – April 13, 2026



DAVID CAMPANA

Legislative and Policy Director
– Economic Development



AARON SEPULVEDA

Legislative and Policy Director
– Education



ESTEFANÍA JAUREGUI

Office Manager

THANK YOU!

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Rev Dr

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ADVISE AND INFORM
**ON LEGISLATION
AND POLICY WITH**
LATINO
MINNESOTANS