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Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc.

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September 3, 2010

Alderman, Robert Donovan
City Hall, Room 205,
200 E. Wells St., Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Alderman Donovan,

RE: Emergency Situation at the Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc. and its Hillview Building

We hope that you are doing well. We also wish to thank you for your ongoing support.

As you may recall, I sent you before a copy of a letter we wrote on July 7 of this year to Mr. Steve Mahan of CDGB. In it, we requested his assistance on a very serious issue that is severely affecting the future of one of the buildings of the Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc., and the many community projects that are there located. You have personally been to the Hillview Building, located at 1615 S 22nd Street, and you may also recall that this facility was donated to the Council. Since 2008, we have worked very passionately and diligently with our staff and partners to transform the facility into a significant community housing and adult education center. Today, and annually, this location provides educational opportunities and social services to over 2000 individuals in the neighborhood, many of whom walk to the Hillview building. The facility, as you are aware, is located in the 8th district, which you represent. There are, however, many residents of the 12th district that also benefit from its services.

Sadly, this past year we ran into a problem that can seriously affect the safety of the facility and disrupt the progress of families in the community.

Behind the building, there is a hill and retaining wall which has gradually been sliding down onto the wall of the back of the first floor and its emergency exit and windows. Recently, and in previous years, during heavy rains, water and mud came through the rear doors of the facility and flooded the entire first floor. To prevent this from happening again, we had to block the doors, put out sand bags to stop the flooding, and build a temporary holding wall. This condition is threatening the safety of the facility, and we cannot continue to keep the emergency doors blocked.

To counter this serious safety issue, and to develop professional drawings on what needs to be done, we contracted with a local architectural firm, "Arquitectura." We also contacted the Milwaukee Housing Authority who sent professional staff to review the situation and plans. After reviewing the input of all parties, our architects finalized construction drawings and received city approval. I am including, as an attachment, construction drawings for your review.

Through this process, we have also carefully assessed how we can correct the problem as economically as possible, without compromising quality. Surely this is a crisis situation that we did not anticipate, and we did not budget for it. After much exploring and discussions with various parties, we feel we have brought the project down to a minimal cost of \$120,000 (the original estimation was closer to \$300,000) and approximately \$15,000 in architectural, project management, and permit fees. The Council has been incurring some of the initial fees and this could possibly become a threat to our financial stability.



On Wednesday, August 4, 2010, Mr. Steve Mahan, city officials, several of our staff, board members and our architects toured the Hillview building and the damage we suffered, which I described above. Those who visited concluded that we have a major emergency situation that needs to be corrected before this winter season arrives. Mr. Mahan was very understanding and supportive. He was particularly appreciative of the work we had done to ensure that the city's Neighborhood Services Department approved our plans to correct the Hillview building situation (the drawings I attach received approval from city professionals). Mr. Steve Mahan recommended that we make an emergency request from the Community and Economic Development Committee, but we need your direct support in this matter.

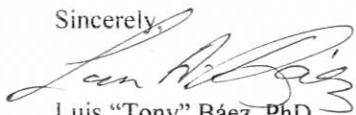
The Community and Economic Development Committee will meet again on September 14. We respectfully request, and would be very appreciate, if your office develops a formal resolution requesting the Committee's approval of \$135,000 for the Hillview renovation, as an emergency situation that needs to be immediately addressed before winter arrives. We have discussed this matter with our architects and the construction company that is willing to perform the work, and they are waiting on the Committee's decision. We have also discussed this matter with Alderman Jim Witkowiak, who will support your request in the Committee, in which he is a member. As I understand it, Mr. Steve Mahan's office will also support this request.

Again, we need your assistance in resolving our current safety crisis as soon as possible, and we are willing to assist your office in any way necessary. I appeal to you because I believe you understand well what the Hillview building and its programs mean to this community (please see the write-up on Hillview following this memo). We certainly wish to ensure that we continue to offer at his site programs in housing; transitional living arrangements for the mentally challenged; adult education and workforce development; education for the parents of disabled children; health and financial education; a legal clinic on civil and criminal law; professional development in bilingual education and cultural competency; extensive partnering with other non profits, banks, and businesses; and the beautification of the neighborhood.

I will follow up with you soon with a telephone call, and I would be happy to facilitate a visit and tour of the Hillview building.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Luis "Tony" Báez, PhD
President/CEO

Cc: Steve Mahan, CDGB
Tony Pérez, Housing Authority
Daisy Cubias, Mayor's Office
David Espinoza, Chair of CSS Board
Julia Luna, CSS Facilities Committee
Harry Oudenallen

ATTACHMENT
Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc.
Hillview Building and Programs

The description that follows is to help to further inform what our Hillview building means to the community we serve.

Over the past two decades there has been a growth of the Latino population in the Clarke and Muskego Neighborhoods to close to 67%. The Hillview building is properly in the Muskego Neighborhood and our general service area. Most of those we serve come from zip codes 53204, 53215. With this growth come many social, cultural and linguistic needs that many of us have been addressing with our programs and services. The Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc has been one of the most prominent organizations in the area. By turning the Hillview building from a nursing home to a community center, we provide additional access to English language learners and other residents.

Annually, well over 2,000 persons are served by programs at our Hillview building. Persons in need of education and training for jobs are using its very large and modern classrooms, its wireless community room, and the two computer labs (approximately 50 computers) provided by our partner, MATC. The Council, the HIRE Center, Marquette University, and MATC all hold classes at Hillview. The building's large conference and meeting rooms have also been made accessible to many non profits in the community and to institutions that need to offer conferences or workshops. For instance, meetings and training sessions have been held there by the South Side Organizing Committee; the Milwaukee and Chicago offices of Immigration; Disabilities Wisconsin; Community Advocates; Alianza Latina; our Head Start' Professional Development component; and the Milwaukee Public Schools. Most recently, we held information and training sessions by the staff with the US Census 2010. Harris Bank has also provided financial literacy workshops to residents, and health and educational conferences have also attracted hundreds of participants. Now working at Hillview are approximately 32 full time staff. We also have several student/summer workers and some 20 law students and 8 lawyers that provide services that were not in that neighborhood before.

Specifically, on the first floor, we have our HUD subsidized senior housing management and service center. The Housing Management program provides services to 154 residents in another 6 buildings for the elderly and disabled. The program is staffed by three (3) full time staff and several student/summer workers. In addition, we have a partnership with Community Advocates that has offices for five (5) transitional housing staff. We also partner with Alianza Latina to provide home services to parents with disabled children. Well over 375 families are helped to better understand how to relate to and prepare their disabled children for school participation. Three (3) full time staff members have offices at the site; large parent training sessions are held at Hillview by the program; and some 11 board members of the program use a conference room for their regular meetings. On the first floor we also have an industrial kitchen that we have not fully developed, but we can surely use help in its complete renovation.

On the second floor, we have a successful partnership with Community Advocates for a Transitional Housing Program. The program has 28 bedrooms dedicated to the homeless and mildly mentally ill adults. Clients may spend as much as 3 months living on site, and are assisted with assessments, paperwork to access county and state services, and placement at permanent housing. That program has gone very well, and on a 24/7 basis they

help us with building security and beautification. The 16 Community Advocate staff loves the facility and would appreciate any help in correcting the problem to ensure complete access to the back of the building.

Hillview's 3rd floor was totally renovated. We created 8 large classrooms, 2 computer labs, offices, meeting rooms, and a large wireless community room. Approximately 10 teaching staff and several student workers provide on-site educational services. Typically, the place is full of life, packed with adult students seeking pre-employment training, bilingual GED, Civics, ESL other adult education. The program receives funding from the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wisconsin Technical College, MATC, UMOs, and we have worked very closely and contracted for services with the Milwaukee Workforce Development Board, the HIRE Center, and The Trade Adjustment Act (TAA).

On the 3rd floor, we also offer the Legal Clinic in partnership with Marquette (again, we have well over 20 law students and some 8 lawyers and faculty who volunteer every Wednesday to provide free legal advice to residents). Marquette is also offering a required course on diversity and cultural competency to its nursing master level students. Regularly, Head Start also uses the location for their staff professional development and to offer courses and workshops necessary for certification. Many local community groups use the 3rd floor for meetings, including the recently established organization of home child care providers from the area, which meets regularly and is a promising community oriented initiative.

This combination of services is a refreshing accomplishment in a neighborhood that needs this type of community center. It has added stable jobs and added significantly to the ecology of an area with one of the highest rates of population density in the city.

Our Hillview building has quickly turned into a community resource, and we feel strongly that it needs to be supported and made even more accessible with weekend employment training and education programs.