



THE GULLAH & LATINO ADVISORY COUNCIL  
CONSEJO ASESOR DE LATINO Y GULLAH

*Inclusion Diversity Equity Access*  
*Inclusión Diversidad Igualdad Acceso*

**SESSION ONE – FEBRUARY 23, 2023**

At Christ Lutheran Church of Hilton Head

For Questions, contact Terry Herron 843-271-9919

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Gullah Latino Advisory Council facilitated a discussion of 30 Gullah and Latino Community Participants of the Low Country together with four public service Panelists from all levels of government in the Low Country: State Senator Tom Davis, Beaufort County Council Member Larry McElynn, Hilton Head Town Council Member Alex Brown, and Hilton Head Town Council Member David Ames.

The objective of the discussion was to introduce the Panelists to the Community Participants and to allow the Panelists to hear first-hand from the Participants about their unique concerns and struggles. The objective of the Gullah & Latino Advisory Council is to foster conversation between these important marginalized communities and the government and public agencies that are called to serve them. The Gullah & Latino Advisory Council aims to create a more reliable level of cultural sustainability through the integration of these two dynamic (but underserved) populations into the mainstream of our community.

This is an abbreviated summary of the two hour discussion. It is meant to identify the key learnings from the lengthy discussion we had.

**TOPIC I - GENERAL ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES**

Question: Do you feel like public spaces like hospitals, banks, DMV, and government offices are accessible to people of your communities? Does anything prohibit you from doing business in any of these places?

Answers given by Participants:

- This is an overriding concern for both Gullah and Latinos.
- Latinos need and appreciate more bilingual documents.
- Many or most Latinos depend on their children to translate, person to person, in these places.
- Sometimes bilingual documents are available, but often they aren't.
- People who have the authority to make executive decisions, or clerks who are trying to help, are often not trained or able to assist when language is a barrier or a limitation. All of the burden of communication is often placed on the Latino or foreign speaker who needs help.
- There is a lack of education, sensitivity training or awareness to this need by either leadership or staff personnel in many public services.
- It would be helpful if staff members were made aware how traumatic it can be for some foreign language speakers to simply make the effort and to show up.
- The “perception of accessibility” of government agencies is also a problem.

**Notable Quotes:**

*“Accessibility to government agencies, banks, hospitals: It’s not just accessibility; it is the perception element of accessibility and how I am being treated by the individual person in the office. There are those acting as vigilantes [in some government offices] that make the entire office look bad due to the bad treatment they are providing. We need sensibility training and DEI [Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive] training. One does not have to speak Spanish to feel a non-English speaking person feel welcome.”*

*“Many Hispanic owned businesses practice in the underground due to lack of knowledge on how to obtain the permit or licenses.”*

*“The census does not reflect the reality. In Beaufort, Hispanics are 31.2% of the population. In Jasper County 44%. Even though we, Hispanics, are a great force in this community, we still must live and work in the shadows. Provide us with guidance, resources, and accessibility. “*

**DISCUSSION TOPIC II – PERMITS & LICENSES**

The question of accessibility merged into a discussion about application for business licenses and drivers licenses.

- Once a person is able to obtain an application for a business license or permit, a Social Security or Driver’s License is required. Many Latinos don’t have Social Security numbers, but have ITIN numbers that are issued by the IRS. Because of this simple, unintended barrier at the Town and City level, people can’t get permits or licenses. There is no box to check for the ITIN #.
- When buying a car, Latinos must pay a much higher down payment and higher interest rate. The DMV will issue a title and car registration, simply because Latinos are willing to pay the higher amounts. In other words, they can receive everything for the car, but cannot get a driver’s license.

**Notable Quotes**

*“When it comes to the city level, everything stops because we don’t have a Social Security number or a driver’s license number.”*

*“Would it be possible for local government offices to accept ITIN and a country-of-origin photo ID or passport?”*

*“The law, as it stands, pushes people to do the wrong thing.”*

*“Even when a person dies and a death certificate needs to be created, if there is not a Social Security number or driver’s license number, there is a problem with death certificates.”*

*“Latinos default in their loans the least of any group of people. Statistically they default far less than anyone else. D&R Auto loves Latinos – they are their cash cows. “*

**Positive Outcome** : Because of this conversation about this topic, Hilton Head updated their business license application to include Social Security number **OR** ITIN number!

### DISCUSSION TOPIC III – DACA and CITIZENSHIP ISSUES

This led to a discussion about DACA and citizenship issues.

- DACA is an executive order by former President Obama that is renewed every two years. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“Dream Act” children) brought into the US. Before DACA, after high school, one could not attend college without a Social Security number. There are 6000 highly educated DACA students in South Carolina, 600 in Beaufort County alone.
- DACA recipients are the cream of the crop. The best students and citizens.
- In South Carolina, DACA recipients have to pay out of state tuition and cannot qualify for any grants or financial aid.
- In South Carolina DACA recipients cannot get a license to practice a trade (like nursing or cosmetology, or real estate).
- We’re forcing DACA recipients out of South Carolina to other states to work at what they’ve been trained for in South Carolina Universities and trade schools.

#### Notable Quotes

*“SC is one of the most oppressive states against DACA recipients.”*

*“You are killing the golden goose.”*

### DISCUSSION TOPIC IV – HOUSING

Question: How has the lack of affordable housing affected your communities?

- This problem is affecting all communities, all levels.
- Businesses are all having a hard time finding employees and keeping employees, because employees cannot afford their rent.
- Since covid, Gullah families are struggling and losing their homes. They need special help to apply and qualify. For Gullah’s, it is not a language barrier; it is a struggle with their low income and an ownership paper trail .
- They can get a loan with a Tax ID, but because there is a much higher risk with Latinos or some Gullah, this automatically means higher interest rates and a bigger down payment.
- Loan Defaults by Latinos are lower than any other single demographic. Statistically they default less than anyone else.
- Despite having to over-pay for most major things, Latinos manage to buy their homes and pay their mortgages as much or more than other demographics
- People who do not have full citizenship are able to buy houses. In Beaufort County, you can submit proof of primary residency and be taxed at the 4% rate. If the home is not your primary residency, it’s taxed at 6% rate. People who don’t have full citizenship may not have the required proof of residency, including a driver’s license or voter registration card. We have people who are buying their primary residence who can never qualify for their deserved 4% tax rate.

#### Notable Quotes

*“I’m a child of the 50’s and my families purchased their properties in cash. So, all I had to do was move in. But now, I am looking around and it does not look the same because everyone is having to move further out from Hilton Head, Bluffton, Beaufort and Beaufort County ... and it is disheartening.”*

*"I live in the Beaufort City limits. Developers who are coming in to build these beautiful townhomes and are getting incentives even though they are not focused on considering low housing income. "*

*"You are pushing me out of town to Hardeeville, guess what will be closer to me now: Savannah!"*

*"We had to move my mom in with us because of the increase in rent. And now developers are coming and the tax brackets are now being affected as well. Just want to add that component"*

*"Minorities need to be encouraged to visit their local banks and make connections"*

*"Even with those hurdles, Latinos without full citizenship typically save and purchase their home. So, can we have a conditional tax rate? Perhaps charge a 6% for two years and then allow people to have 4%."*

## **DISCUSSION TOPIC V – EQUAL REPRESENTATION**

Question to Panelists: How are we doing in terms of diverse community leadership?

- Panelists agreed that there was not diverse representation in councils and government jobs.
- Panelists asked what would be helpful to attract more diverse groups of people to join.

### **Notable Quotes**

*"You need to pull us in and feel welcome. We need to step up, but you need to pull us in."*

*"When you want us to come, come with a welcoming face or attitude, and tell us that we are qualified enough to be at the table and that we are part of this community and that we matter. If you are not coming to our community and let us know that you need us, we are not coming."*

*"The type of community outreach that you are doing now is not reaching us. Without this conversation, I wouldn't have known you are interested in us being part of this community."*

*"I didn't know that I was needed to represent the Gullah community until I was invited to be part of this type of issue."*

*"A question was asked; how do you surround yourself with people who don't see color? Surround yourself with people who understand the culture."*

*"Different nationalities, that's America. We need to make sure that when people come together, we don't try to destroy it. Make sure that if you are coming for people, that you love people."*

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

The Panelists were asked to mention something that they learned from the evening's conversation.

**Tom Davis:** *"Just how something as seemingly trivial [to me] as a driver's license or a Social Security number locks you out of so many things such as the ability to borrow money at a competitive rate. I have been making notes of things I can address at a state level. Many of which I learned tonight because I don't encounter them."*

**Larry McElynn:** *"I learned that something, in a practical level, as simple as a provisional license could change lives. I learned the importance of DEI and the importance of staff training, and I will see that gets done."*

**David Ames:** *"I realize as a town councilman that we succeed better when we have a more diverse council and we have not been successful in recruiting. What can we do to attract a more diverse group of members to join us. Could a conditional or provisional driver's license help with this issue?"*

**Alex Brown:** *"This group is, in my mind, a communications vehicle. I have taken notes and would like to thank you for the opportunity to being a part of this. We will see if we can come up with an action report to address some of the issues being discussed tonight."*