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### **Rev. Luis Cortés, Jr. Calls on House Leadership to Lead Where the Senate has Failed**

Sept. 6, 2007, Washington, D.C. – Testifying today before the House Judiciary Sub-Committee, on Immigration The Reverend Luis Cortés, Jr. described conditions across the country since comprehensive immigration reform legislation failed to pass the Senate and hundreds of state and local enforcement initiatives became law:

“Even I wonder whether I need to carry my passport”, Rev. Cortés declared, explaining that a fundamental value of American jurisprudence –the presumption of innocence– is gone. “For thousands of third, fourth and even fifth generation American citizens their color now defines the limits of their rights. The color of our skin or the sound of our accent now provides us the privilege of being detained, harassed or accosted in an effort to determine our status”.

Rev. Cortés described communities where criminal elements now prey on innocent, law abiding, hardworking residents, most of them American citizens, now afraid to call the police, deciding it is easier to let certain crimes go, to not get involved as witnesses, than to fall victim to over aggressive law enforcement still learning the ropes of immigration enforcement.

Rev. Cortés called on House Speaker Pelosi and House Leadership to lead where the Senate has failed, “to show the same leadership, and ability to resolve differences as demonstrated 10 years ago when Congress passed comprehensive welfare reform. The welfare reform debate was heated and full of conflict and controversy. Yet Congress and this country came together and solved one of the biggest domestic problems of the 1990’s. I have faith you can rise to this similar challenge today.”

Commenting on current discussions about whether to move one immigration legislation as one or separate bills, Rev. Cortés urged that, if legislation is moved in pieces, to include as one of those pieces legislation, such as Title VI of the STRIVE Act, that provides ways for the undocumented to earn legal status.

“In survey after survey,” he continued, “65% of Republicans and 72% of Democrats consistently support legal status *with a path to citizenship* for illegal immigrants who get in the back of the line, pay penalties, learn English and pass citizenship courses. If the House could find the courage to have the debate, to educate their junior Members and their constituencies, we just might solve the biggest domestic issue of this decade.”

The Rev. Cortés urged House leadership not just to take the easy road and pass the pieces of legislature for which there is already consensus among Members. “Now is the time to educate constituencies. Now is the time to educate your junior Members and lead by example. Let’s have a debate and a national discussion. Let’s take a vote”.

Rev. Luis Cortés is president of Esperanza, the largest Hispanic faith-based community development corporation in the country. With a national network of 10,000 faith and community-based agencies, Esperanza is one of the leading voices for Hispanics in America. For more information, go to [www.esperanza.us](http://www.esperanza.us).

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