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ISSUES OF CONCERN TO PUERTO RICANS IN BOSTON AND SPRINGFIELD

A Report of the
Massachusetts State Advisory Committee,
to the
United States Commission on Civil Rights
February 1972

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TO THE

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PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights

The United States Commission on Civil Rights is an independent agency of the executive branch of the Federal Government created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957. By the terms of that act, as amended by the Civil Rights Act of 1960 and 1964, the Commission is charged with the following duties: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study of legal developments with respect to denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting denials of the equal protection of the law; and investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

The State Advisory Committees

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105 (c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 as amended. The Committees are made up of knowledgeable persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission upon matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission in matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference which the Commission may hold within the State.

This report was submitted to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights by the Massachusetts State Advisory Committee. The conclusions and recommendations contained herein are based upon the Advisory Committee's evaluation of information received at open meetings in Boston, May 12-13, and Springfield, Massachusetts, May 11, 1971, and on staff and Committee investigations preparatory thereto. This report has been received by the Commission and will be considered by it in making its reports and recommendations to the President, the Congress, and Federal Departments and Agencies.

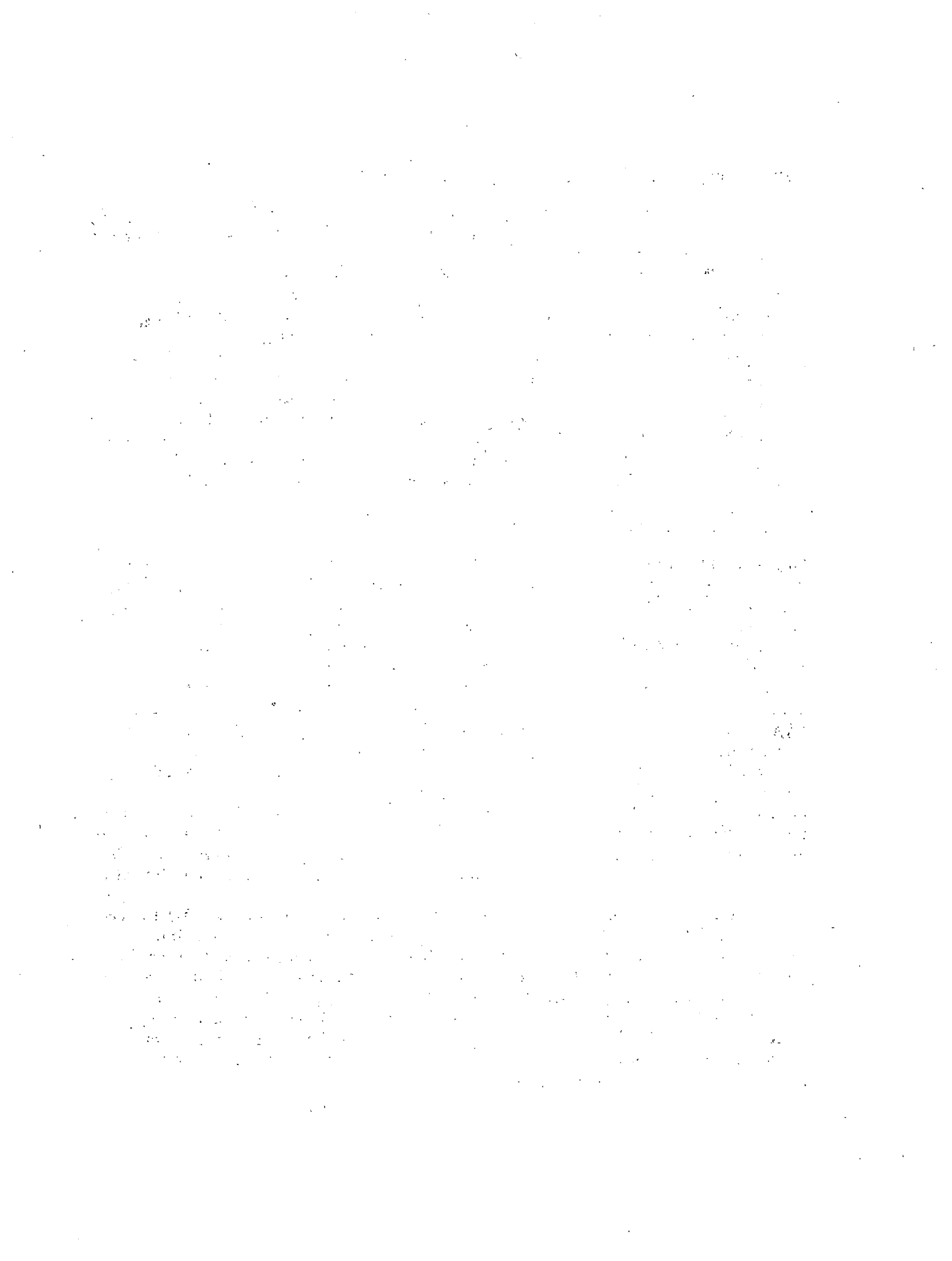


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INTRODUCTION

During the 1960's the fact that black people in this country held second class citizenship was finally made visible to America. The historic marches in the South, the sit-ins, the long delayed black articulation of the rights the Constitution guarantees all citizens were definitely woven into the fabric of American life.

With the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, American minorities were given hope as some of their denials of equal opportunity, primarily in the area of public accommodations, began to diminish. However, immense areas of such denials of equal opportunity remain.

In the 1970's other minorities joined in the nationwide civil rights struggle. Foremost among these was the Spanish speaking American. From the Mexican American in the Southwestern deserts to the Latin American and Puerto Rican in sprawling East Coast cities, these groups compose a vital element of American society that can no longer be ignored.

Aware of the daily frustrations and defeats for Puerto Ricans in Eastern cities, the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights has initiated a study to determine solutions to some of these problems.

The Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the Commission prepared the following report on conditions in Boston and Springfield, the cities with the largest concentrations of Puerto Ricans in the Commonwealth.

Throughout the meeting, the lack of adequate statistics on living conditions of Puerto Ricans remained one of the main barriers to determining a solution for any problem of the Puerto Rican community. This situation is particularly serious for the school children, who are classified as "white" or "nonwhite" but never as Puerto Rican.

A second impediment permeating all Puerto Rican problems is the language barrier. Agencies in Boston and Springfield consistently had insufficient Spanish speaking personnel, placing the Puerto Rican in the fringe area of a man who knows his needs but who can find no one to listen.

The report is based on three sources of information: statements of speakers at an open meeting held May 11-13, 1971; exhibits submitted directly to the Committee; and telephone conversations with speakers following the open meeting.

Education

Despite inadequate statistics, the Committee estimated that at least 2,500 Puerto Rican children in Boston are not attending school. In Springfield almost one-third of the Puerto Rican students at Chestnut Street Junior High School left before graduation. However, even if the Puerto Rican student does remain in school, he is destined to an education which will prepare him only for a "non-professional" job.

Bilingual education is an important and vital part of the struggle to give Puerto Rican children an adequate and equal education. Both Boston and Springfield have Title VII funded programs. These programs will expire in 5 years, and neither school system has devised a plan that will enable these programs to continue. Rather, the systems prefer to rely on "English as a Second Language" programs. This heightens the feeling that the Boston and Springfield schools believe the primary and often exclusive objective of bilingual education is the teaching of English. Very few programs contain a significant bicultural component, and Spanish is seldom, if ever, taught.

The lack of an adequate Spanish speaking staff is another grave deficiency in the Boston and Springfield schools. The hiring statistics for staff of these school districts may provide a partial explanation as to why the schools have failed the Puerto Rican child.

Employment

Language is also a barrier for the Puerto Rican seeking work. One out of every four Spanish speaking males in Massachusetts cities is jobless. Often this fact is directly caused by a language barrier. Many jobs, such as those under civil service, require that applicants take some type of written examination. The examinations are always in English.

Like the schools, all the State agencies and employment programs in the Boston and Springfield areas suffer from a continuing lack of Spanish speaking personnel. The Massachusetts Civil Service Commission does not even keep a record of the number of Spanish speaking employees in the civil service system.

Housing

Housing for Puerto Ricans in the ghettos of Boston and Springfield is inadequate, substandard, and expensive. In Springfield, the average Spanish speaking family pays more than one-fourth of its income for housing. The ghettos frequently provide the only means for the Puerto Rican family to live comfortably with their own language and culture.

Housing code enforcement and rent control would greatly alleviate many of the problems facing Puerto Ricans. However, the housing commissioner stated that there was nothing his department could do about landlords who charge high rents for property with code violations or property that should be condemned.

Even public housing is not yet a realistic alternative for the Puerto Rican community. Only 4 percent of Boston's public housing is occupied by Puerto Ricans.

Much of the access to public housing for the Puerto Ricans is blocked by the "1,2,3 rule", which requires applicants to choose units in the developments with the largest number of vacancies. Often these are not near the Puerto Rican community, and the applicant must then either take an apartment he doesn't want or go to the bottom of the list.

Social Services

Hospitals and public assistance offices are vital institutions in the life of a poor person. Social services in Boston, though, show the same hindrances evident in education, employment, and housing--a lack of statistics and an inability to communicate. Puerto Ricans are often afraid to go to the welfare department because they cannot communicate with the social worker, and they feel the treatment they receive is degrading. A Puerto Rican attempting to gain access to a hospital has to have an interpreter fill out the hospital admission form. This need for interpretation continues throughout the search for health services.

Rather than endure such hardships, many Puerto Ricans prefer the community clinics, where they can at least communicate with the personnel.

Antipoverty and Model Cities Programs

There are 17 Massachusetts Community Action Agencies working with the Spanish speaking community. Less than 8 percent of the 3,000 employees of these agencies are Spanish speaking. The model cities programs also suffer from the same inadequate staffing patterns.

But personnel is not the only drawback. Most of the agencies' programs are directed to the black community; the Puerto Rican community's needs are seldom considered. The Concentrated Employment Program (CEP), administered by the Springfield Action Commission, trains and develops basic working skills among the economically deprived. Of the 150 persons CEP has placed in the last 3 years, only two were Spanish speaking.

Model cities programs do not have a better record. Puerto Ricans claim that the Spanish speaking communities are not included in the geographic boundaries of the model cities areas. Only 2 percent of the 18,500 model neighborhood residents in Springfield are Puerto Rican.

Part of the explanation of the paucity of Puerto Rican inclusion in the model cities programs is the lack of any agency which offers intake and referral services. However, the Boston Spanish Alliance Planning Center has proposed a multiservice center which has been approved by the model cities administration and now awaits funding by HUD.

Federal Enforcement

The Federal Government has displayed little leadership in securing total civil rights for Puerto Ricans in Massachusetts. It would appear that only one Federal employee is specifically assigned to Title VI enforcement in New England. Region I has a total staff of 4,800 employees, of whom only 30 are Spanish speaking.

EDUCATION

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts historically has been associated with the advancement of learning. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Massachusetts was regarded as a distinguished center of American learning. To a large extent, it is still so regarded. Whatever the term that describes the overall pattern, however, the situation of Puerto Rican children can only be seen as tragic.

In Boston and Springfield the Advisory Committee listened to scores of school officials, parents, and concerned citizens discuss the crisis of the Puerto Rican in the public schools.

Everyone agreed that the problem was crucial and extensive; however, all felt that the dearth of specific data made it difficult to arrive at specific solutions.

I. Statistics

A. Statistical and general data on the Puerto Rican child in school are either nonexistent, deficient, or inaccurate. No records, report cards, test scores, or birth certificates are transferred from the schools in Puerto Rico to mainland schools. School officials claim that it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep accurate records on the Puerto Rican child because of his high degree of mobility. In Springfield, figures on Puerto Rican enrollment are always preceded by words of approximation. Dr. John E. Deady, the school superintendent, reports that "there are in the neighborhood of 1,800 youngsters in our schools. It is fluid because approximately one-half to one-third of the youngsters each year turn over."

Community leaders also point out that the problem is aggravated by the classification of Puerto Ricans either as "black" or "white". Such a classification is necessary under the State Racial Imbalance Act, although the State has not determined how to classify Puerto Ricans. Thus, some school departments lump the Puerto Rican with "whites" while others place these students with nonwhites. In no case are Puerto Ricans classified as Puerto Ricans or with other Hispanic groups.

B. Public School Enrollment

Taking into consideration the unreliability of available statistics the Advisory Committee found the following:

1. Boston

Boston's public school statistics record a Puerto Rican enrollment of 1,791 children. In addition, according to a well-documented study by Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), there are at least 2,500 "missing" Puerto Rican children in Boston not attending school. The ABCD survey revealed that "nearly one-third (31.2 percent) of Spanish speaking children aged 6 through 17 living in Boston are not attending school. The highest proportion is in the 12 through 15 age bracket, where 34 percent are not enrolled.

Asked about these "missing students", Dr. William Ohrenberger, superintendent of schools, replied: "Well, I would assume that they are not known by me, and, therefore, I can't get them, but I assume they are at home."

Despite the evidence presented by the ABCD and other reports, the Boston School District has refused to admit that a sizable number of Spanish speaking children in Boston do not attend school. Suggestions that the school district conduct a citywide census to identify these children not in school were overruled on the basis that the school district had neither the money nor the personnel for such a census.

In 1970-71 there were 1,615 Puerto Ricans enrolled in elementary schools and 176 enrolled in high schools in Boston. According to a Puerto Rican community leader, there is a 90 percent dropout rate from Boston schools by Spanish speaking students. The school district does have statistics on Puerto Rican students who officially withdraw but none on those who simply vanish.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has shown an interest in the problems of Puerto Rican students, although its efforts have been limited. The department of education has the legal authority to study the special educational needs of Puerto Rican children and it has made recommendations on the subject to the Boston and other school districts. In addition, it is conceivable that the Massachusetts Department of Education has the authority to force local school districts, through fund cutoffs, to insure the Puerto Rican child an adequate education. As yet the State department of education has not intervened in the case of Boston's "missing students".

For the Puerto Rican child, his problems are just beginning when he is located and enrolled in the public schools. The ABCD survey of the Spanish speaking community also revealed that nearly half (45.1 percent) of all Spanish speaking children who are in school (both public and private) are 1 year or more behind their expected grade level.

In 1970, seven Puerto Ricans were graduated from high school in Boston: of these, four were from parochial schools and three from public schools. Puente, an educational organization funded by HEW, was able to place two of these seven in college.

The high dropout rate is often the product of frustration. One witness at the hearing testified to this fact:

They came from Puerto Rico, they're in the 10th, 11th, or senior year of high school, and they're 18,17,19 years old, they came to Boston and they place them in the 6th and 7th grades. You're wondering why they drop out. A person does not feel -- his identity is lost right there. When a person--all these little kids younger than him, 11, 12 years old. Here's a kid 19 trying to learn and he automatically gets an inferiority complex and quits.

2. Springfield

Although Springfield is much smaller than Boston, its Puerto Rican population is comparable. The city has all the unfavorable conditions of Boston but, because of the proportionately larger Puerto Rican population in Springfield, the dilemma may be more serious. The Springfield public schools have a total student enrollment of 31,216. The Puerto Rican student enrollment is 1,172 in elementary schools and 313 in high schools.

Dropouts are a major concern in Springfield. The school district conducted a study of Puerto Rican dropouts which revealed that 90 out of 313 dropped out of the regular programs at the predominantly Puerto Rican Chestnut Street Junior High School.

In addition, 34 of the 70 Puerto Rican students enrolled in the fundamental education program (designed to teach the fundamentals of speaking, reading, and writing English to non-English speaking students) dropped out during the school year 1969-1970. Out of these 34 dropouts, school records show that 24 dropped out to return to Puerto Rico.

Those who remain in school have no guarantee of success. In 1971, 11 Puerto Ricans graduated from high school in Springfield. All were in commerce, trade, or technical courses. None was in the college preparatory curriculum. Of the Puerto Ricans enrolled in high school in 1970, four were enrolled in the classical college preparatory/course. The overwhelming majority was enrolled in commerce (43) and technical (17) curricula. The remainder (28) were enrolled in trade courses. The 1969 statistics remain virtually the same. Three Puerto Rican students were enrolled in classical courses, 27 in commerce, 25 in technical, and 17 in trade. It seems that if the Puerto Rican student can withstand the forces which encourage him to drop out of school, he is relegated to a high school curriculum which prepares him for nonprofessional status in the job world after graduation.

II. Programs and Personnel

If there is to be a solution to the crisis of the Puerto Rican in the classroom, there must first be an awareness of the problem. Over and over again, the Committee heard of a lack of Spanish speaking and Puerto Rican teachers or guidance counselors and the inadequacy of the present programs for Puerto Rican youngsters.

A. Bilingual Education and Title VII

Bilingual education is a widely accepted technique for teaching English to non-English speaking students while preserving the students' mother tongue and culture. Yet in Boston and Springfield, bilingual education is a "luxury" not available to the vast majority of Puerto Rican children. As currently implemented in these two school systems, bilingual education under Title VII^{1/} is only a shell of what it promises the Puerto Rican community.

Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorizes the Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to fund bilingual education programs operated by local school districts. These programs are designed to meet the special educational needs of children from low-income families who have limited English speaking ability and in whose home environment the dominant language is not English.

Federal funds from Title VII support most of the bilingual education programs in Springfield and Boston. For 1971-72, Boston will receive \$175,225 to run seven bilingual classes. Springfield will receive \$116,000 for bilingual classes in grades K-6 at the Carew Street School.

Rather than fully developing Title VII bilingualism, the school districts are relying on the "English as a Second Language" program (ESL), essentially a course for English language skills, without cultural overtones. ESL is usually studied for only a limited number of hours per week. Bilingual education differs from ESL in that it uses the two languages, English and Spanish, for language instruction as well as for teaching subject matter.

^{1/} Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended.

It does contain substantial bicultural component. Results from the Carew Street School show that in a bilingual classroom, Spanish speaking children perform as well as English speaking classmates down the hall. In ESL classrooms, the results are disheartening. While the child may learn English, he is falling behind in his or her other subjects. Many are discouraged and, hence, drop out.

Despite research to disprove the belief, the school districts of both Boston and Springfield still regard the "English as a Second Language" program as a panacea for remedying all the educational problems of the Spanish speaking child. Thousands of Federal dollars (in 1970-71, Boston spent \$346,000 or 7.2 percent of its total Title I budget on ESL while Springfield spent approximately \$125,000) are added to substantial local funds to support a piecemeal and ineffective method of teaching English. In the meantime, Puerto Rican children continue to fall behind in their daily classroom work.

With the exception of the Title VII bilingual programs, the bilingual education programs in both Boston and Springfield reflect the belief that the primary and often exclusive objective of a bilingual education program is the teaching of English. The programs are seen as transitional, i.e., after the student has attained an acceptable level of English proficiency he is transferred to a regular class. Minimum attention is given to the teaching of Spanish and very few programs contain a healthy bicultural component. Little attention is given to the value of preserving the students' "other" language and culture.

Despite this crying need for bilingual education, in 1970-71 only 486 Puerto Rican children were enrolled in "bilingual" education programs in Boston and 290 Puerto Rican children were enrolled in Springfield's