




**A Civic Engagement Update  
for the Pennsylvania Latino Community**

**A CONGRESO** Bi-Monthly Publication

**December 22, 2006**



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Dear Fellow Pennsylvanians:

As we approach the New Year, we recognize the importance of preparing ourselves for new budget proposals, new legislatures, a new local election season and potentially shifting priorities on the local, state and federal levels.

As we shift into gearing up for 2007, in terms of programming, advocacy and engaging the Latino community, Congreso has focused on the Latino Juvenile Justice Network in this issue of the Civic Engagement Update. In addition to its importance as a stand alone issue, Juvenile Justice touches critical areas such as educational success (truancy and drop-outs) and youth violence, issues that are crippling the prosperity of some of our youth.

Congreso is the lead convener of the Philadelphia Latino Juvenile Justice Network, and we implore you to become involved. If not for the issues outlined above, for the very fact that one in six Latino males born in 2001 are expected to go to prison at some time in their lives. For the same crime, Latinos are much more likely to serve time than their white counterparts. We must join forces to protect our youth and provide them alternatives to this dismal prospect of a future. This is a joint effort, like education, workforce development and violence. Government, business, and social services communities must all join together to ensure a bright future for our youth.

We look forward to your partnership.

Gracias,

Nicholas Torres  
President, Congreso de Latinos Unidos

**Congreso's update on city, state & federal issues affecting the Latino Community shared with community leaders around PA, staff, and other interested parties.**

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### Important Dates

- **December 28, 2006 12noon**

The PA Minimum Wage is increasing to \$6.25/hour as of January 1, 2007. Help spread the word and raise awareness by bringing friends to the **Minimum Wage Rally** at Gallery Place on 10<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets. Governor Rendell and one of Congreso's employees are among the speakers.

- **January 15, 2006**

**Martin Luther King's Service Day** – a day on, not a day off. Many of us have the day-off from work on Martin Luther King Day. As a way to commemorate his legacy, many community members are celebrating his activism by helping where needed. See <http://www.mlkdayofservice.org> for ideas on how to serve.

- **January 23, 2006 2pm**

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is holding a **quarterly USCIS/CBO meeting** held at their office at 1600 Callowhill Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130. The new pilot citizenship test will be discussed at the meeting. See more in the Newsworthy section. Confirm your attendance by e-mail or by calling 215.255.4837 by Friday, January 12, 2007.

- **February 14, 2007**

Stay tuned for more information about the February 14<sup>th</sup> Commemoration Event and 101<sup>st</sup> minute. Looking to commemorate all of the successful work in the Delaware Valley around federal immigration reform. Put the date on your calendar!

- **January – February 2007**

University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Inquirer have partnered to form the initiative called "**Great Expectations: Citizen Voices on Philadelphia's Future.**" This effort will bring together ordinary folks, civic leaders and experts for dialogues to name and frame the chief challenges facing Philadelphia, identify possible solutions, and suggest which ones to our Mayoral candidates that hold the

most promise. See <http://www.fels.upenn.edu/greatexpectations.htm#forums> to make your voice heard and attend the forums.

- **January – April 2007**

See the attached “**Public Conversation Series 2007**” listing for intriguing conversations at U Penn on issues of concern, including Public Safety, Poverty, and the Justice System; Welfare Reform; and School Reform and Equitable Development.

*If you have any other information that would be important for Congreso to include, please email the Director of Civic Engagement, Kristin Shipler, at [shiplerk@congreso.net](mailto:shiplerk@congreso.net). We want to represent and advocate for all issues affecting Latinos in the SE Pennsylvania area.*

## *Highlight:* Latino Juvenile Justice Network

### Background

Congreso, alongside multiple other community-based organizations, has prioritized juvenile justice reform as an advocacy effort for this coming year. In doing so, we recognize the importance of addressing this issue, and as additional incentive, it also relates to other important issues that are gripping our communities: violence in our neighborhoods; the drop-out crisis; and truancy. How do we guide our youth so that they stay out of harm's way, aren't a perpetrator of violence, and keep from the system to begin with, so that their futures aren't plagued with the effects of the system? How do we keep our youth in school, knowing that education is the essential key to prosperity?

The Latino Juvenile Justice Network (LJJN) is a project of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). It is a Latino-specific model for juvenile justice reform. The LJJN is a long-term, multi-state juvenile justice reform effort based in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Washington, and Louisiana. It is a component of the national program, Models for Change Initiative funded by the MacArthur Foundation.

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/locations/PA/>. Pennsylvania was one of the few states in the country that avoided a punishment-focused approach to juvenile crime, making it a logical first participant when MacArthur started a selection process for its Models for Change program in 2003. Estelle Richman, Secretary of the state Department of Public Welfare, is a strong advocate of the efforts of the Models for Change. What makes Pennsylvania distinct in juvenile justice policy includes:

- Increasing judges' expertise in juvenile justice policy and training;
- Incentives for programs, not confinement;
- The use of evidence-based practices and funding of prevention programs;
- Screening detained youth for mental health issues;
- Supervising youth in their communities; and
- Keeping detention populations low in Philadelphia's Youth Study Centers.

Great strides, but many of us would say that we have a way to go to expand and improve on these efforts. Congreso is the lead convener of the Philadelphia LJJN, and the Lighthouse, Cornell Abraxas, APM, Women Organized Against Rape, and El Concilio are members. There is also an LJJN in Reading, Berks County. Both LJJNs are looking to expand their capacity and effectiveness through new partners and increased activity.

### *¿Y Qué?*

So why should we be concerned?

1. Latino males have the lowest on-time graduation rate of any group in Philadelphia: 29.3-38.2% (The average high school graduation rate in Philadelphia is 51%).
2. 90% of youth involved in the juvenile justice system during high school drop out.<sup>1</sup>
3. Our country's incarceration rates are the highest in the world.
4. Approaches that support treatment and community-based alternatives save money, promote safety and build communities.
5. Between 1985 and 2000, state corrections spending (166%) grew at six times the rate of higher education (24%).
6. Nearly one in six Latino males born in 2001 is expected to go to prison at some time in their lives!

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<sup>1</sup> Turning It Around: A Collective Effort to Understand and Resolve Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2006

7. Although Latinos do not commit more crimes than whites, they are much more likely to serve prison time. (Hispanic youth are incarcerated 4 to 5 times the rate of white youth.)<sup>2</sup>
8. Young people of color represent nearly two-thirds of young people in detention.
9. 27% of youth in the juvenile justice system has mental health disorders severe enough to require significant and immediate treatment.
10. In PA, Hispanic youth make-up 5% of the state's youth population, but represent 10% of youth in detention or committed to facilities.
11. There is no reliable statewide data on Hispanic youth, since data collection methods are flawed and race/ethnicity codification doesn't consider the different races of Hispanics. Hispanic/Latino is an ethnicity, not a race.<sup>3</sup>

**The national goals of the LJJN are to:**

- Create a system that is fair and responsive to the needs of all children, and which takes into account the cultural and linguistic needs of Latino children; and
- Ensure that there are programs that address the root causes of youth crime and violence, and provide the proper guidance and support for youth to become community assets. This includes alternatives to incarceration; substance abuse and mental health treatment; educational support/mentoring; and job-skills training.

The LJJN plans to accomplish these goals through media outreach; community education and mobilization; research and policy analysis; and advocacy.

**Nationally, the LJJN focuses on four Core Issues:**

**\*Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)**

Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) occurs when the number of minority youth in the justice system represents a higher percentage than their representation in the general population. Latino youth are often unfairly targeted for police stops, arrested, detained, waived to adult criminal court, and sentenced to serve longer periods of time. As a result, Latino youth are significantly overrepresented, and receive harsher treatment than White youth; even when charged for the same types of offenses.

**\*Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration**

Community-based alternatives to incarceration are a smarter and more cost effective solution to non-violent youth crime. Research has shown that community-based treatment programs that are culturally and linguistically appropriate reduce recidivism rates among Latino youth. Alternatives to incarceration reduce the justice system's over-reliance on a "one size fits all" approach –incarceration. It maintains children close to their families and communities while they are supervised receive treatment, and life skills. Moreover, alternatives to incarceration restore community safety, and increase confidence in the justice system.

**Adultification/Transfer into the Adult System**

Adultification occurs when a child or youth is tried as an adult (in adult court); and sentenced to confinement in adult facilities. Many Latino youth are disproportionately transferred into adult criminal courts, jails, and prisons. As a result, youth transferred into the adult system are at greater risk to commit suicide, be sexually assaulted, be assaulted by staff, or attacked with a weapon. Furthermore, the adult criminal justice system is not equipped or designed for the treatment and rehabilitation of youth.

**Anti-Gang Laws**

Over the past few years, there has been a trend in the enactment and implementation of anti-gang laws across the nation. While gang-violence is a serious problem that affects the Latino community directly, these laws which purport to secure the community actually harms the community by disproportionately targeting Latino

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<sup>2</sup> Justice Policy Institute brochure [www.justicepolicy.org](http://www.justicepolicy.org)

<sup>3</sup> Models for Change: Building Momentum for Juvenile Justice Reform: 2006

youth and their families simply by where they live, who they associate with or how they look. Anti-gang laws increase the use of racial profiling by police and justice system personnel by stereotyping Latino youth.

**\*So under this umbrella the Philadelphia LJJN will focus on Community Alternatives to Incarceration and Disproportionate Minority Contact in 2007. Join us and define how that translates into action for 2007!**

### **Philadelphia LJJN's successes**

In 2006, the Philadelphia LJJN held two community workshops, to raise awareness about juvenile justice issues and to educate the community on how they can become involved.

- In May 2006, 50 community members decided for the LJJN that their first priority for our work lay in addressing alternatives to incarceration.
- In the November 2006 forum, the LJJN (with the Philadelphia Police Advisory Commission, a Sergeant from the 25<sup>th</sup> Police District, NCLR and the Juvenile Law Center) educated, raised awareness and shared tips and resources around “knowing our rights” during police encounters, to prevent entry into the juvenile justice system. For 2007, the LJJN will ramp up efforts to continue the “Know Your Rights” workshops and also become increasingly involved on the local and state levels to combat Disproportionate Minority Contact and advocate for alternatives to incarceration.

### **Congreso's Position**

As a non-partisan, community-based organization in the Eastern North Philadelphia community, Congreso de Latinos Unidos is committed to affording better opportunities to our youth and bringing a Latino perspective to juvenile justice reform, especially since our community is greatly impacted by the system.

### **Congreso's Action**

- Congreso is honored to be the Lead Convener of the Philadelphia LJJN. We plan to expand the network in 2007, to include a youth subcommittee, as we see the impact this work can have on effective reform for Latinos. We invite the private, non-profit and government sectors to join us.
- Congreso led the development, facilitation and delivery of the 2006 workshops.
- Congreso recently gave testimony to the Educational Task Force and City Council on related issues, the drop-out crisis, truancy and the E3 center as a potential model for serving adjudicated youth.
- Congreso has a multitude of youth prevention and intervention services. Our mission is to strengthen Latino communities through social, economic, education and health services; leadership development; and advocacy. 34% of our clients in 2006 were under the age of 17; we have a commitment to those youth and their success.



## Immigration

1. NY Senator Charles Schumer, the third-highest-ranked Democrat in the U.S. Senate, has set a goal of having **a federal immigration bill, based on the proposal (S2611) by Senators McCain and Kennedy, ready in six months.** He told EL DIARIO/LA PRENSA that “Reaching consensus for comprehensive immigration reform is one of the most important priorities of the new Congress. I’ve always said my commitment is to find a fair, balanced, human and rational solution that includes a path towards citizenship.” On December 20<sup>th</sup>, President Bush publicly announced his support of bipartisan solutions on comprehensive reform.

2. SB 669 passed the PA legislature at the end of November. The bill creates **a certification system for court interpreters, and it requires that interpreters be provided in certain court proceedings and most state administrative hearings.** Make certain that Latinos needing translation are aware of this, as they should appropriately advocate for an interpreter in court.

3. USCIS released 144 questions and answers for the pilot test of **a new naturalization exam.** USCIS will administer the pilot exam in early 2007 to about 5,000 volunteer citizenship applicants in 10 cities, to work out any problems and refine the exam before it is fully implemented nationwide in the spring of 2008. The questions and answers are posted on the agency Web site, <http://www.uscis.gov>. The test will be discussed at the USCIS/CBO meeting held at 2:00 PM on Tuesday, January 23, 2007 at 1600 Callowhill Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130. Confirm your attendance by e-mail or by calling 215.255.4837 by Friday, January 12, 2007.

**4. The Secure Fence:** Despite the law authorizing a 700-mile fence along the Mexican border, Congress and the White House are advocating instead for SBInet, a mix of fencing, vehicle barriers, sensors, cameras and other surveillance technology to create a virtual barrier along 6,000 miles of U.S. northern and southern borders. The Department of Homeland Security notes that SBInet will cost \$1.2 billion this year and \$7.6 billion through 2011 on the southern border alone. By comparison, DHS agencies expect to spend \$40.7 billion for border security between 2008 and 2011.<sup>4</sup>

5. An interesting look at **anti-immigrant state and local groups** around the country, from the civil rights group Building Democracy Initiative. Note how many are in PA, even though our foreign born population (less than 5%) is quite low on a national scale: [http://www.buildingdemocracy.org/index.php?option=com\\_jmr\\_fmas&id=1&Itemid=91](http://www.buildingdemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_jmr_fmas&id=1&Itemid=91). There are **now 32 proposed anti-immigrant ordinances in PA**, compared to 3 in Texas.<sup>5</sup> Nashville, TN recently decided against passing an anti-immigrant ordinance, based on Hazelton’s failure to succeed in doing so.

6. Immigration in PA - The Center for Immigration Studies states that **Pennsylvania was one of the states with the largest growth in legal immigrants** between 2000 and 2005. The state's immigrant population increased nearly 47 percent in that period, from 364,000 to 534,000. PA has 12.4 million residents, so that means there's one legal immigrant for every 23 Pennsylvanians. The Department of Homeland Security states that Pennsylvania doesn't rank in the top 10 states which account for about 8 million of the estimated 11 million illegal aliens.<sup>6</sup>

7. The PA Bar Association issued a formal statement recently that highlights its intention to **actively pursue unauthorized practiced of immigration law by any persons not authorized to practice law** by federal regulations, due to several years of complaints from immigrants who have been misrepresented. If you know of these instances, contact the PA Bar Association. <http://friendsfw.org/Bar/PBA/UPL/Immigration/default.htm>

8. The economic impacts of immigration were recently highlighted in a report released this week by Texas State Comptroller Carole Keeton. The main message is that **“Illegal immigrants not only pay their fair share in taxes, but also are good for the economy.”** Overall these immigrants put \$420M more into the state than they take out. This type of report is important as it highlights economic benefits of immigrants to a state (including PA!) and as a carryover to the debate on a federal level for comprehensive reform.

<sup>4</sup> Washington Post, December 5, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Center for Community Change, [www.communitychange.org](http://www.communitychange.org)

<sup>6</sup> The Morning Call, December 6, 2006

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## Education

Congreso has signed onto the **United Way's efforts to develop 2-1-1**, the 3-digit telephone number (in English & Spanish) that would provide access to human services. To endorse it yourself, contact [joew@uwsepa.org](mailto:joew@uwsepa.org).

Congreso spoke at the **recent Education Advisory Task Force meeting** at the Lighthouse in North Philadelphia, emphasizing the importance of collaboration with community-based organizations, improving truancy efforts and prioritizing the drop-out crisis. Congreso and ENPYS highlighted the fact that **Latino males have the lowest on-time graduation rate of any group in Philadelphia: 29.3-38.2%**. This fact was also highlighted in Congreso's **testimony to City Council** on December 11<sup>th</sup>, when the drop-out crisis was addressed. City Council will hold another meeting on the drop-out crisis January 30, 2007 where Congreso will speak again.

Mayor Street has stepped up efforts to keep children in school. Parents now face fines and jail time if their children consistently remain absent from school.

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## Economic Self-Sufficiency

Remember – The **State Minimum Wage will increase to \$6.25/hour as of January 1, 2007**.

Remember to adjust your budgets, encourage Latinos earning minimum wage to advocate for themselves to ensure an increase AND celebrate the first increase in nine years! The minimum wage will increase again July 1, 2007 to \$7.15.

The federal government is looking to do the same, through a bill introduced by Sen. Kennedy. The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress has it in its "1<sup>st</sup> 100 minutes" legislative agenda to **increase the federal minimum wage to \$7.25**. President Bush has, for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, publicly supported the increase, with tax protections for small businesses (similar to PA's provision.)<sup>7</sup>

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## Health

The **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** has a new **newsletter in Spanish** called "*Avanzamos*". Access this resource at [www.nami.org/avanzamos](http://www.nami.org/avanzamos).

Governor Rendell signed into law this week **protections to victims of child sex abuse**. The Senate unanimously passed SB 1054. The impetus of the law is focused on closing loopholes for reporting abuse and criminalizing the concealing of abuse by an abuser's supervisors. Important legislation for those of us who serve children.

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## Safety & Violence

**Rep. Dwight Evans** came to Congreso December 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss his **ideas for combating violence in Philadelphia**, as a part of his Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia program. His proposed solutions include four elements: better law enforcement; an effective justice system; quality education; and community partnerships and involvement.

Looking to combat crime in your neighborhood? Look at this website to assist in generating ideas. See the **Philadelphia Youth Aid Panel** link, as they are seeking volunteers. We need to ensure Latino participation, so that our Latino youth are averted from getting into the juvenile justice system<sup>8</sup>.  
<http://www.phillyneighborhoods.org/Crime-Phila/crime-phila.html>

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<sup>7</sup> Washington Post, December 21, 2006

<sup>8</sup> PHENND Newsletter November 24, 2006

## Safety & Violence (cont.)

Philadelphia's DHS has charged a nine-member panel of local and national experts with reviewing all cases since 2002 in which children died of neglect or abuse, with a goal of **reforming the city Department of Human Services**. The group will be investigating DHS community service providers and its report is due May 1.

Congreso and partner organizations held a **"Know Your Rights" workshop** November 18<sup>th</sup>, representing our work with the **Latino Juvenile Justice Network** in Philadelphia. The workshop was presented in partnership with the Juvenile Law Center and the Philadelphia Police Advisory Commission. Stay tuned for the next Civic Engagement Update which will focus on statistics that highlight overrepresentation of Latinos in the system and what we can do about it! There is another LJNN in Reading, PA. The LJNN seeks to identify issues and approaches for juvenile justice reform specific to Latinos. If you are interested in joining either the Philadelphia or the Reading partnerships, contact Kristin Shipler at [shiplerk@congreso.net](mailto:shiplerk@congreso.net).

**The Coalition to End Handgun Violence needs your help!** We are seeking those of you, especially advocates outside of Philadelphia, who have new legislators in the State House and Senate to get involved in making sure these legislators prioritize handgun violence control. Contact Kristin Shipler at [shiplerk@congreso.net](mailto:shiplerk@congreso.net) to become involved.

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## Electoral Participation

See "Important Dates" for another way to get involved in the debate on **how to make Philadelphia a great city!**  
<http://www.fels.upenn.edu/greatexpectations.htm#forums>

**Philadelphia Mayoral hopefuls for the 2007 election include Rep. Dwight Evans, Michael Nutter, US Rep. Chaka Fattah and Tom Knox.** US Rep. Bob Brady has yet to decide if he is running. All of the Mayoral candidates and City Council hopefuls will compete in the May 15, 2007 primary election. There are no Republican Mayoral candidates to date.

Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi has **nominated Congressman Xavier Becerra (D-CA) as Assistant to the Speaker** in the upcoming 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. He was the first Latino to serve on the influential Ways and Means Committee, and he has worked to improve the Social Security program for women and minorities, to combat poverty among the working poor through welfare laws, and to strengthen Medicare. He was also former Chair of the Hispanic Caucus.

For interesting insight, from a national non-partisan perspective, on **how 2006 Elections fared in Pennsylvania**, see <http://electionline.org/Portals/1/Publications/EB15 briefing.pdf>

Tentatively, **Democrats will retain newly gained power in the Pennsylvania House** after a hand-recount for the 159<sup>th</sup> District in Chester County. Instead of the 23 votes she initially won by, Democrat Barbara McIlvaine Smith, has tentatively won by 4 more votes! Again, showing the power of just a few votes.

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## Housing

Governor Rendell has created a **website in Spanish to help residents deal with high energy prices**. Applications for LIHEAP are included.  
[www.sinfrioPA.com](http://www.sinfrioPA.com)

## Important Links

### GOVERNMENT

- **US Senator Specter** <http://specter.senate.gov/>
- **US Senator-Elect Casey** (temporary site) <http://www.bobcasey.com/>
- **US House of Representatives** <http://www.house.gov/>
- **PA General Assembly** <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>
- **Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs (GACLA)**  
<http://www.gacla.state.pa.us/gacla/site/default.asp>
- **Philadelphia City Council** <http://www.phila.gov/citycouncil/index.html>
- **US Citizenship and Immigration Services** <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm>

### NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- **Congreso de Latinos Unidos** (Multi-service, social service and civic engagement organization for Latino communities in Philadelphia) [www.congreso.net](http://www.congreso.net)
- **ENPYS – Eastern North Philadelphia Youth Services Coalition** (a group of community-based organizations located in Eastern North Philadelphia to coordinate services and ensure that children and families have access to resources, information and support services) [www.northphillysos.net/](http://www.northphillysos.net/)
- **National Council of La Raza** (Latino advocacy) [www.nclr.org](http://www.nclr.org)
- **National Immigration Forum** (national immigration issues) <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>
- **Pew Hispanic Center** (Latino research & statistics) <http://pewhispanic.org/>
- **We Are America Alliance** (Federal immigration reform) [www.weareamericaalliance.org](http://www.weareamericaalliance.org)
- **Committee of Seventy** (Philadelphia-based electoral information) [www.seventy.org](http://www.seventy.org)
- **The Next Mayor's Project** (informative to learn about the Philadelphia Mayoral candidates and how the public wants them to prioritize the issues!) [www.nextmayorproject.org](http://www.nextmayorproject.org)
- **The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** (fiscal policy and public programs that affect low- and moderate-income families and individuals) [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)
- **Pennsylvania Budget & Policy Center** (a project focused on state tax, budget, and related policy matters, and effects on working families) <http://www.pennbpc.org/>
- **The Children's Advocacy Project of Philadelphia** (over 200 resources to help families in need) [www.cap4kids.org/philadelphia](http://www.cap4kids.org/philadelphia)
- **Metropolitan Philadelphia Indicator's Project** (social, environmental and economic indicators that portray the quality of life in the region's communities) [www.temple.edu/mpip](http://www.temple.edu/mpip)
- **The Next Great City** (dedicated to creating a positive future for Philadelphia by advocating for policies that enhance environmental quality, strengthen neighborhoods and increase our economic competitiveness. *Congreso has endorsed this effort.*) [www.nextgreatcity.org](http://www.nextgreatcity.org)

