



¡Somos Más! Latino Civic Engagement in Massachusetts

Monday, Oct. 5th, 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Agenda

Welcome

Javier Juarez, *Executive Director*, Latino Equity Fund at the Boston Foundation

Opening Remarks

Lorna Rivera, PhD, *Director*, Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development & Public Policy, UMass Boston

Research Presentation

Rafael Pérez Medina, *Policy Analyst*, Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development & Public Policy, UMass Boston

Karla Corres Luna, PhD, *Postdoctoral Fellow*, EGADE Business School, Tecnológico de Monterrey

Panel Discussion and Audience Q&A

Rafael Pérez Medina, *Policy Analyst*, Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development & Public Policy, UMass Boston

Shanique Rodriguez, *Executive Director*, Massachusetts Voter Table

Andy X. Vargas, *Representative*, 3rd Essex District, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Moderator: Julio Ricardo Varela, *Founder*, The Latino Newsletter; *Senior Producer & Strategist*, Free Press



Speaker Biographies

Dr. Lorna Rivera is Director of the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development & Public Policy, and Associate Professor in the Leadership in Education Department at UMass-Boston. Rivera has a Ph.D. in Sociology, and her research focuses on women's literacy programs, social welfare reform, gender/racial/ethnic-based health disparities, and the education of Latinx students. Currently, Rivera is a Principal Evaluator on the "Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Equitable Community Responses to COVID-19" project with the Boston Public Health Commission. She is a Co-PI on the study, "Community-driven environmental health assessment in Vieques, Puerto Rico". Rivera oversees the Talented & Gifted (TAG) and Proyecto Alerta bilingual summer learning academies for Boston Public Schools students. Rivera serves on the Board of Directors for the Hyde Square Task Force, the Center to Support Immigrant Organizing, and the Executive Board of Directors for the Inter-University Programs on Latino Research in the US. She formerly served on the city of Boston's COVID Health Inequities Taskforce and contributed to the city's Health Equity Now Plan (2021).

Rafael M. Pérez Medina, MS, is a Latino Policy Analyst at the Gastón Institute, bringing more than two decades of experience in applied research, community development, policy analysis, and program leadership. His work focuses on issues affecting Latino communities in Massachusetts, including housing stability, economic mobility, institutional access, civic participation, and public policy. Previously, he served as Chief Program Officer at Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción and worked with the U.S. Census Bureau and the Chelsea STAR Project. He holds a B.A. in Geography from the University of Puerto Rico and an M.S. in Environmental Management and Planning from Metropolitan University.

Karla Corres Luna is a doctoral candidate in the Organizations and Social Change program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She works at the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy as a research assistant and serves as the outreach coordinator for the Latinx Knowledge Hub. Before moving to Massachusetts, she worked in central California in community organizing, public policy, and affordable housing. Her research focuses on social enterprises and community cohesion in both the United States and Mexico. She recently completed a García-Robles Fulbright Fellowship (AY 2024–2025).

Julio Ricardo Varela is an award-winning journalist and media entrepreneur. He is Senior Producer and Strategist for Free Press, a D.C.-based nonprofit media and journalism advocacy group, an MS NOW columnist, and the founder of The Latino Newsletter. Julio is the 2025 ¡BRAVO! Awards Journalist of the Year from the Hispanic Public Relations



Association. Also in 2025, We Are ALX named him to its ALX100 list of leading Latino American changemakers in Massachusetts, featured in The Boston Globe Magazine. As President of Pulitzer-winning Futuro Media, Julio oversaw business and operations and helped guide the company's editorial vision. He previously served as Futuro's Editorial Director, leading teams at Latino USA, Latino Rebels, In The Thick, and the Community Podcast Lab, and as Vice President of New Business Development for Futuro Studios. In 2011, Julio founded Latino Rebels, a top U.S. Latino digital media site that joined Futuro Media in 2018. He co-hosted the In The Thick political podcast from 2015 to 2023 and, as Futuro's Digital Director from 2015 to 2020, oversaw historic audience gains for Latino USA. He was Digital Producer for Al Jazeera America's "The Stream," and his work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, The Guardian, and NBC News. He was also a contributing reporter at The Boston Globe and a top publishing executive. The National Association of Hispanic Journalists gave Julio its inaugural DALE Award in 2015. He graduated cum laude from Harvard College, where he was Sports Editor of The Harvard Crimson.

Shanique Rodriguez is a political, social, and reproductive justice activist who has dedicated nearly a decade to organizing in BIPOC communities across Massachusetts. With a BS in Criminal Justice from Mount Ida College, Shanique is a native of Kingston, Jamaica, and is a current resident of Springfield. She brings her lived experiences and passion for uplifting and finding justice for marginalized communities like her own to her work. In 2022, Shanique delivered a hard-fought win for the Fair Share Amendment campaign as the BIPOC Community Director. Prior to the Fair Share campaign, Shanique spent 4+ years at Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts working on reproductive rights and justice issues in Western and Central MA as the Manager of Mobilization and BIPOC Organizing.

Andy X. Vargas represents the 3rd Essex District (Haverhill) in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He serves as the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Businesses. He also serves as the Chair of the MA Black & Latino Caucus. Rep. Vargas was previously elected to the Haverhill City Council, where he served as the city's first Latino elected official. He grew up in Haverhill and his family origins are from the Dominican Republic. He is a proud graduate of Haverhill High, Boston University, and the Harvard Kennedy School. Rep. Vargas is also an alumnus of the Obama White House and previously worked for Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll), helping entrepreneurs start their businesses. Some of his legislation successfully signed into law include mandating civics education, universal school meals, boosting housing production, and the expansion of access to the life-saving drug, Naloxone.