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February 18, 2004

Honorable Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.  
Office of the Governor  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Ehrlich,

On June 30, 2003, and subsequently on October 13, 2003, we respectfully requested a meeting to discuss the progress that your administration had made in appointing Hispanic-Americans to senior paid political positions. A meeting had been scheduled for July 22 but was postponed because of a conflict in your schedule. We are again requesting that your staff reschedule this meeting.

In the June 30 letter we noted also that an African-American educator had been offered the position as Secretary of Higher Education, but he had declined further consideration. We then suggested on October 13 that this position would lend itself to the appointment of a Hispanic educator, but you appointed instead the former 32-year president of Coppin State College, Dr. Calvin W. Burnett, to serve as acting secretary. We do not know all the reasons that led you to decide to replace one interim secretary with another instead of choosing a permanent secretary. However, this interim status lends itself for us to reiterate our desire that you consider a Hispanic-American for this position. This request would also help you fulfill your election promise to be inclusive and to “form an administration that reflects Maryland's racial and ethnic diversity.”

We also recommended that you appoint a Special Assistant to the Governor for Hispanic Affairs. This is particularly important in light of the strident and xenophobic tenor of some Maryland Republican legislators and the abusive and reprehensible behavior of the Maryland GOP chair which has done so much harm to your administration. At no time in the history of Maryland has there been an administration which has been contaminated by so much hate and rancor. Ironically, you campaigned as a “uniter not a divider” and as a candidate who was determined to “change the culture of Maryland.” Yet, within weeks following your inauguration you seemed to have, unfortunately, achieved the opposite.

A poignant testimony to the lack of leadership in the area of inclusiveness after fourteen months into your administration is the fact that of the 500 (some even say more than 2000) paid top political positions, there are still no Hispanic appointees. Regrettably, during your October 9, 2003 speech before the Maryland Hispanic Business Conference, and later during an interview with WTOP-FM Radio political commentator Mark Plotkin, you said, "My Cabinet is extremely diverse". But you know that is not the case. There is only one minority group represented in your Cabinet and in the top 500 positions. We celebrate your success in reaching out to the African American community, but we respectfully insist that you should include other minority groups as well.

It is regrettable that even your Lieutenant Governor, in an interview for *El Tiempo Latino* (October 31, 2003), stated that “many [Hispanics] are not in leadership positions, but we are sure that if we are re-elected in 2006 we will appoint Hispanics in our cabinet, particularly persons who now have administrative positions [in the Ehrlich Administration] and could be promoted.” (“Muchos [Hispanos] no estan en posiciones de mando pero estoy seguro que de ser reelegidos en el 2006 nombraremos representantes hispanos en nuestro gabinete, particularmente personas que hoy ostentan cargos administrativos [in the administracion de Ehrlich y que] puedan ser promovidos.”) You may recall that in media interviews the MHRC characterized Mr. Steele’s remarks as “an unfortunate statement from an elected official that the Republican National Committee seems to have selected to speak for all minorities.” (“GOP bid to woo minorities benefit Steele,” *Washington Post*, October 12, 2003).

The blatant xenophobic and/or condescending attitude of members of your administration, Republican legislators, and the chair of the Maryland GOP vis-à-vis the Hispanic community and its leaders has been counterproductive to working together to make Maryland a better and safer place to live and work. We have said this before and it merits being said again. There is a political element that you must factor in when dealing with the needs and expectations of the Hispanic community. Your own internal polls and our anecdotal evidence suggest that in your race for Governor you won the Hispanic vote—at least in Montgomery County—thanks to the indefatigable efforts of many of our members. But if you continue to overlook appointing Hispanic-Americans to the top echelons of your administration, the Hispanic community is likely to believe—and rightly so—that it is being taken for granted, and they may not support you in 2006.

As we predicted two years ago that the 2004 presidential election would be highly contested, we believe also that your re-election in 2006 will be quite challenging and thus, the Hispanic vote will be important. Obviously, the Maryland Hispanic Republican Caucus is committed to working towards your re-election, but you must understand that Hispanic Republicans represent a small—albeit extremely active and influential—component of the Hispanic community in Maryland. And your stance in this and other Hispanic issues and the glaring blunders of the Maryland GOP chair have made our task of proselytizing Hispanics into the Republican Party quite difficult. Moreover, an unfortunate impression has been created by some of your staff—and even your own political guru, Mr. Kevin Igoe—that the Hispanic vote is not important. However, we say every vote counts. Your advisors, therefore, should remember that here in Maryland, Ellen Sauerbrey lost to Parris Glendening in 1994 by only 5,000 votes and Congresswoman Connie Morella to Chris Van Hollen in 2002 by the same margin. In both situations, the Republican candidates would have won their respective elections if they had secured a greater proportion of the Hispanic vote, but they did not make it a priority.

We stand ready to assist you in achieving diversity in your administration. In order to further that goal, we again ask for a meeting with you to discuss how we can work together to bring the desired changes needed for your administration to be truly inclusive and to help the Maryland GOP become a respected political party once again.

Very best regards,

*Jorge Ribas*

Jorge Ribas  
State Chair