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TO: Court of Common Council and The Citizens of the City of Hartford
FROM: Mayor Eddie A. Perez
DATE: March 8, 2004
RE: **State of the City Address 2004**

Pursuant to Chapter V Sec. 2 (i) of the City of Hartford Charter, I hereby respectfully submit my written report on the state and condition of the City of Hartford:

President Lafontaine, members of the Court of Common Council and Citizens of Hartford, it is my pleasure to come before you tonight to tell you that the state of our city is strong and getting stronger every day.

Three hundred and seventy-one years ago in the place where Hartford now stands, Dutch traders built a fort and called it the "House of Hope." In 2001, we committed ourselves to rebuilding our House of Hope, and we have made a good start. Our work over the last two years has created a strong foundation. We have built four strong walls based on a new Charter, a new Board of Education, a new Administration, and a new Partnership with community, corporate and neighborhood groups. Now that our house is standing strong, we must turn our attention to the people who live within it. We must reinvest in our human capital.

In order to improve the lives of our residents, we have embarked on major initiatives and we have already begun to make sweeping changes in the way our government functions. We will continue to work hard to make it more efficient and accountable.

There are five major areas I would like to highlight this evening: neighborhood and economic development, workforce development, education, homeownership, and community policing.

Everywhere you look you can see progress in all of Hartford's neighborhoods. This progress is a testament to the members of this Court of Common Council who put politics

aside and joined together to put the needs of our community first. Thank you for your hard work and commitment.

Downtown the cranes are towering over our skyline as the investment in our downtown becomes a reality. A convention center, hundreds of new apartments and new retail space will be filled with thousands of new visitors and residents. The city should be proud of the significant financial role we have played in making these projects a reality.

I am proud to say that today we closed the agreement on the Hilton Hotel. Though some said that our city could never meet its goal of responsible development, we proved them wrong. Under our agreement with the Waterford Group, more investment will be made in the rehabilitation of the hotel, high quality jobs for city residents will be preserved and the city has received commitments on a rapid renovation of the hotel. We should all be proud of the commitment we have made to responsible development.

From Park Street to Albany Avenue, new investment in our vibrant retail corridors is making a difference in the quality of life in our neighborhoods and changing perceptions of our city in a new direction.

But all of our investment in neighborhood and economic development will be hollow if our residents do not benefit from better jobs that will enable them to support their families. To that end, I have created the Future Workforce Investment System, partnerships across our city so that our young people will have the skills and training to become employable and productive.

We are also opening the doors of higher education to more of Hartford's students. The Blue Ribbon Commission I have put together will shortly announce the best strategies for having more Hartford students attend and graduate from four-year colleges. The jobs of the future will require more education than in the past. We should raise the expectations in our school system and in our community so that our children can succeed, and demand that the state provide the resources they need. We must teach our children that higher education is a goal that all of them can attain, and that it is the key to their future economic success.

We have made the commitment to provide our children with safe, healthy places to learn. Construction is underway at Hartford Public High School and renovations of four other schools will begin later this year. Within three years, four magnet schools and three additional neighborhood schools will also be under construction.

Most of you know that I strongly believe that increased homeownership is key to the revival of our city. I am pleased to report that, over the past two years, we have created the framework to provide more homeownership opportunities in the City of Hartford. From Rice Heights to St Monica's to Putnam Heights, you can see the rebirth of our city. Our Rising Star Blocks have been working with residents in targeted areas to improve our existing stock of homes, and I am looking forward to the arrival of our new Director of Development Services, to take these efforts even farther.

None of these efforts will succeed, however, if residents and visitors do not feel safe. We have fought hard to obtain new resources for our police department and in the past two years we have hired over 100 new police officers. Cops are once again walking the beat, and the response from residents has been overwhelmingly positive. I am adamant that our police must be visible, accessible, courteous and respectful, and we have started to make real progress in these areas.

We have had many successes and many more are within our grasp. We all know that there remain many challenges ahead.

- *How do we take a regional approach to the issue of homelessness that fairly shares the burden between Hartford and its suburban neighbors?*
- *How do we preserve the character of our neighborhoods while encouraging economic development?*
- *How do we make our parking authority an effective vehicle to increase revenue for the city and encourage economic development?*

I will come to you shortly with my proposals on these important issues and I hope we can find real solutions together.

The most important challenge for all of us in the near future is how to prevent a shift of property taxes that would severely increase the burden on our homeowners.

We must be united in our effort to convince our state legislators that their failure to act will harm all our neighborhoods. I have laid out a tax proposal to our legislative delegation and to the council that protects homeownership and encourages business investment.

This proposal is presently before the general assembly thanks to the leadership of members of the Hartford delegation. We need to continue to urge those who have not yet committed to this initiative to recognize the importance of protecting homeownership in all of our neighborhoods.

If we do not receive help from the legislature, the council must be prepared to join me in making the tough decisions that may involve cutting almost \$32 million from our present budget to keep taxes from increasing at an unreasonable rate.

Though these are tough economic times, I believe that our city will continue its rapid pace of revitalization and reshape itself as a community of greater opportunity for all its residents. With your help and the support of the people of Hartford, the brightest years for our city are just around the corner. Our House of Hope will stand as a testament to the work that we commit to here today.

Thank you and God Bless the City of Hartford.