



**DOMINICANOS USA’S TESTIMONY BEFORE  
LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND  
REAPPORTIONMENT SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS  
July 17th, 2020**

Good afternoon chairs Michael Gianaris, Brad Hoylman, Robert Rodriguez and Kenneth Zebrowski and thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment and testify on this important issue. My name is Edward Cuesta, Executive Director of DominicanosUSA.

DominicanosUsa (DUSA) is a Nonprofit and a strictly non-partisan organization committed to the civic, social, and economic integration of Dominican-Americans into all facets of the American life. DUSA advocates and strives to ensure that every U.S. citizen is able to freely and easily exercise their civic rights, realize their full potential, and capitalize on all the opportunities the U.S. has to offer. Our contribution to making this vision a reality begins with our direct and grassroots work in the Dominican-American community.

DominicanosUSA is here today because the New York State Redistricting process is intimately tied to our representative democracy, which is essential to the progress of our growing yet potent population. We make up a significant portion of New York’s large and diverse Latino population. According to 2017 estimates from the Census Bureau, there are 2,081,419 Dominicans or people of Dominican descent living in the United States, with 1,162,568 or 56% of them being foreign-born. In New York State and New York City, the population estimates are 872,504 and 720,020 respectively, with the foreign-born populations at 514,999 (59%) and 441,182 (61%). The 720,020 Dominicans in New York City account for more than one of every nine City residents (12%) and they also account for 29% of Latinos in the City. The 355,494 Dominicans in the Bronx account for nearly one of every four (24%) and almost half (43%) of the Latino Borough residents, making the Bronx the US county with by far the largest Dominican population.

Considering the magnitude of the Dominican population in New York and of the contributions of Latinos as a whole to our great state, we were clearly dismayed to hear that not a single Latino was appointed to New York State’s new Independent Redistricting Commission. It is essential that this commission is as diverse as practicably possible, as stated in its legal guidelines, because representation within such an essential democratic process will help produce political maps which provide Latinos

with a fair opportunity to elect the candidates of their choice, vote for candidates that look like them and candidates that share their experiences.

In an attempt to remedy this oversight, we joined with our partners at the NALEO Educational Fund and LatinoJustice PRLDEF, at the request of the Puerto Rican and Hispanic Task Force, to find and recommend eminently qualified Latino candidates to fill the remaining two seats open on the Commission. After an intense two months of scouring the entire state we found five wonderful candidates and have shared them with both minority and majority leaders in both legislative houses. This process was not easy, and we believe that the current legal structure disproportionately limits the appointment and participation of Latinos to this commission.

DominicanosUSA believes that the application and selection process for members of a redistricting Commission, as noted in the body of law that forms the IRC, must result in a Commission which reflects the geographic, racial, ethnic, gender, and age diversity of the political jurisdiction. The current qualifications make it nearly impossible for Dominicans to participate directly in this process. While we firmly stand by the importance of appointing candidates that have no conflicts of interest, we do find that there should be some exceptions to this rule. For example: State University, or SUNY, Academics, which is where most Latino professors are employed because they often have a deep passion for the public interest, are not eligible to be appointed to the commission because they are state employees. Surprisingly, this is the same case for CUNY academics. Thus, we urge the first eight Commissioners to select qualified Latinos for the remaining seats.

Lastly, considering the current state of our public health and the COVID-19 pandemic it is important that the commission make the twelve hearings it is mandated to host accessible to all communities. We hope that this can be done virtually in order to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus if in-person hearings are not possible in the future. Historically, as you may know, the redistricting process has been intentionally utilized to suppress the electoral power of communities of interest, like Dominicans. We have an opportunity to help ensure a fairer redistricting process by appointing more Latinos to the commission and by making the process as accessible as possible to all communities in New York State. You can certainly enlist DominicanosUSA as a partner in this mobilizing effort. Since our inception we have registered more than 165k US citizens to vote, enlisted our youth to assist in this process, made more than 336k calls, sent out more than 200k mailers and knocked on more than 145k doors. We have been on the ground to make sure that the Dominican community is involved in our nation's democratic process and look forward to doing the same for Redistricting.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. We know you share our goal of a fair redistricting process that allows all New Yorkers a meaningful opportunity to participate, and results in maps that provide underrepresented New Yorkers an opportunity to elect the candidates of their choice. We look forward to working with you to achieve this important goal.