

**Testimony of Eddie Cuesta, Executive Director DominicanosUSA-  
Independent Redistricting Commission - ecuesta@dominicanosusa.org**

- My name is Eddie Cuesta, Executive Director of Dominicanos USA (DUSA) - a Nonprofit and non-partisan community based 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. DUSA has been able to register to vote more than 125,000 new voters, including 58,000 in the Bronx and 24,000 in Manhattan, as well as to help more than 10,000 legal permanent residence to a path to citizenship.
- The results of the 2020 Census revealed that Latinos in New York now represent close to 20% of the state's total population. The percentage of New Yorkers who identify as Latino of any race increased from 17.6% in 2010 to 19.5% in 2020. This is strong growth in the Latino community and means that nearly 1 in 5 New Yorkers identify as Latino. In New York City, 28.3%, or roughly 2.49 million residents identify as Latino. Because of our trust and understanding of the Dominican/Latino community, DUSA played a major role in making sure that our community got counted in the 2020 Census. Our canvassers were out in the community. We had an aggressive marketing campaign in our TV programs, using trusted community individuals. As well as to provide posters and literature at supermarkets and faith based organization.
- We can no longer be described as a minority group; in fact, our demographic growth indicates we have a significant stake in shaping the electoral space of New York.
- In reviewing the proposed maps by the Commission, we were concerned in the manner in which Latino hubs, in particular communities with large Dominican population were grouped so as to discount our communities of interest.
- On the Congressional level, we see the joining of Congressional Districts 13 and 15 to create one congressional district, connecting two very distinct communities from Washington Heights all the way to the South Bronx. Understanding the commission is bound by principles of compactness and contiguity as well as preserving to the extent possible communities of

interest, it is unimaginable the way this district was drawn without consideration of the communities of interest that currently exist.

- When I described our community during the summer hearings, I laid out specific markers which embody the culture and impact of the Dominican community in Washington Heights. I can start with our culture celebration of the Dominican day parade along Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Walking across the Cross Bronx we can find La Plazita on 175th Street and Broadway, where on any given day you can find community members searching through the vast fruits and vegetables offered by the farmers market. Going north towards Dyckman, you will find Quisqueya Heights a recently named area of Inwood lined with restaurants owned by many Latino residents who stood together to overcome the devastating impacts of Covid all while serving the community. Going across the 225 Street and Broadway you can see the integration and connection of the community shopping at Target, the bus lanes and traffic along 207 Street, between Inwood and the West Bronx (Fordham Road), as well as 181 Street that connects Amsterdam to Washington Heights, connecting Amsterdam to University and the Bronx. The Highbridge park pedestrian Bridge, 145 Street Bridge are all important markers that makes our community unique in preserving our districts.
- On the assembly level, we see one of the maps split up the Inwood community along 10<sup>th</sup> avenue disjoining a public housing area which is largely connected to the surrounding Inwood area. These residents are connected to the schools in the neighboring district, places of worship and employment and a sense of community that joins this largely Latino neighborhood. It is instead connected with a district that extends all the way to Tremont in the Bronx.
- I point to these examples as a means of reminding this commission of its obligations to keep communities of interest together, to respect existing districts that have served the Latino community and to remain cautious of drawing districts in a manner which ultimately disempowers the vote of our community.
- We seek to have electoral districts that ultimately allow our residents to elect a candidate of their choice. A candidate that can respond to for example the pressing needs of School District 6 and the overpopulation of many of our elementary schools in the area. A representative that is aware of the hike in rent that has left many residents displaced in the midst of a health and economic crisis. Someone who understands that we are an important voice

and factor in the growth of this community and should no longer be shut out of the electoral process.

- Commission members I ask that you consider revisiting these maps to ensure that the above-mentioned communities are not split in a manner that will silence their voice at the voting booth. We must continuously work to have districts that preserve the interest of people over politicians.
- Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at this hearing, I look forward to the commissions final set of maps which I hope are truly reflective of the demographic change and growth of the Latino community in New York.