



Via email to:

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New York Independent Redistricting Commission

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Dear Commissioners:

We, the New York Latino Civic Engagement Coalition,¹ are writing to express our deep concern with the status of New York's redistricting process and the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission's inability to reach consensus on a single set of maps for consideration by the New York State Legislature. In 2014, New Yorkers overwhelmingly voted to establish the Commission, which created an opportunity to remove the state's redistricting process from the influence of partisan maneuverings that often led to maps that were not fair for all New Yorkers, including Latinos. The current redistricting cycle serves as an important opportunity for New Yorkers to have a meaningful voice in the line-drawing process. As the Commission and the Legislature navigate the process during the upcoming weeks, we continue to advocate for a process that is transparent, responsive to community input, and produces maps that provide New York's under-represented communities with a fair opportunity to elect the candidates of their choice.

As civic engagement organizations focused on protecting the rights of New York's Latino communities, we actively engaged community members in the Commission's redistricting process and mobilized them to provide public comment during the commission's summer and fall hearings. We invested in mobilizing community members to participate in the process because we saw it as a true opportunity for our community's voices to be heard and reflected. We also believe that the Commission's maps must reflect the significant growth of the state's Latino community. The percentage of New York State's Latinos increased from 17.6% in 2010 to 19.5% in 2020; nearly one in five New Yorkers are Latino. In New York State, Latinos accounted for nearly two-thirds (64.5%) of the population growth between 2010 and 2020, and Latinos now comprise 28% of New York City's total population. To ensure the success of the independent redistricting process – a process that should empower community voices and reflect

¹ The New York Latino Civic Engagement Coalition is a non-partisan group of community based organizations consisting of LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Hispanic Federation, NALEO Educational Fund, and Dominicanos USA. Collectively, we engage community members to promote civic engagement while advocating for equitable and open access for Latino community members to the franchise.

Latino growth – the Commission must reach consensus on a single set of maps for the Legislature’s consideration.

Given that amendments to the New York State Constitution established the Commission to insulate line-drawing from undue partisan influence, we are extremely disappointed. This critical process was mired in partisan infighting, which led to the commission’s failure to reach consensus on a single set of maps. We are particularly troubled because New Yorkers provided many hours of public input throughout the summer and fall, envisioning that their input would inform one set of maps that would meet the state’s redistricting criteria.

Members of the Commission came together at the beginning of this process to advocate for adequate funding, resources, and independence for your work. After that commendable show of unity and common purpose, members spent precious time in non-collegial and non-constructive internal dialogue rather than working to reach consensus to produce one single set of maps informed by the hours of public comments received in hearings throughout the state. If you do not ultimately reach consensus, the line-drawing process will revert back to the hands of the Legislature, which does not have the clear and formal mandate that the Commission has to actively pursue and incorporate public comment into its maps. The timeframe the Legislature has to produce its own set of maps is unclear. Because the Legislature would need to approve maps in time for election administrators and candidates to prepare well in advance for New York’s June primary, there is a serious risk that the Legislature would conduct a rushed line-drawing process without sufficient opportunities for public comment.

Under these circumstances, community members and the organizations that serve them would not have sufficient time to mobilize to provide meaningful input to the Legislature that reflects the needs of under-represented people. We are particularly concerned because of what occurred during the 2010 redistricting cycle, when the Legislature produced state Assembly and Senate maps with overpopulated districts downstate, underpopulated districts upstate and additional senate seats to maintain partisan strongholds. Widespread frustration with that process is what led voting rights advocates to call for the creation of an independent redistricting commission.

New York stands to serve as a national leader by implementing a redistricting process that is free from undue partisan and incumbent influence. Given that the Commission launched its redistricting process with a strong unity of purpose, held 23 hearings, and obtained testimony from thousands of New Yorkers, we expected that it would successfully submit a set of maps that the Legislature would find hard to reject and that would thereby prevent the Legislature from again assuming control of the line-drawing process.

As the Commission is now tasked with submitting a second set of maps, we urge members to place partisan allegiances aside and submit one set of maps to the Legislature that provide under-represented communities in New York a fair opportunity to elect the representatives of their choice. The Commission must populate districts in a manner which complies with the U.S. Constitution’s “one person, one vote” mandate, and its maps must strictly comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Commission must also promote transparency in all of its work, and ensure that the process of providing input by community members is as accessible as possible. If the Commission achieves the foregoing goals, its maps will help chart the course for

a fair and responsive democracy for New York for the next 10 years, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Commission to make this vision a reality.

Respectfully Submitted,

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