

Testimony by Nestor H. Montilla, Sr.
Chairman, National Dominican American Council (NDAC)

PUBLIC HEARING OF THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON
DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND REAPPORTIONMENT

Thursday, September 8, 2011 at 10:00 A.M.

Bronx Community College of The City University of New York
Gould Memorial Library Auditorium
2155 University Ave
Bronx, New York

Mr. Chairman Nozzolio and Mr. Chairman McEneny, I am Nestor Montilla, Chairman of the National Dominican American Council, a civic-community-engagement initiative composed of local councils in the United States and territories, including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. The National Council joins the Dominican American National Roundtable, leaders and community based organizations in advocating for the socio-economic and political development of our communities in areas concerning education, economic development, health, immigration and community empowerment.

My remarks today express the position and recommendation of the National Dominican American Council.

Our position is that we are endorsing and supporting the community's efforts to have a new Latino congressional district created, that would reflect the ever growing Hispanic population in the State of New York. Our recommendation is a map proposal I have submitted for your consideration.

Mr. Chairmen, as we prepared to testify before you today, we spent many weeks trying different ways to draw the map proposal you have in front of you now. It is a Latino majority congressional district, in essence, a redrawing of Congressional District 14. The proposal, which is 60% Latino, encompasses Latino neighborhoods from el Barrio in Manhattan, to the west and north of the Bronx and to the South of Yonkers. This map indeed reflects the growth of the Latino population in these neighborhoods and also reflects their common interest and peculiarities, including common language, culture and way of life, place of work and where they practice their religion.

As we kept trying drawing sample maps, we were pleasantly surprised to find out that it didn't matter how we draw it, we could always ended up drawing a majority-Latino congressional district. We could have draw it eat to west, north to south; it didn't matter the direction we took.

The main reason for this is the increasing number of Latinos in the City. We are here. We are not longer invisible. WE ARE HERE.

Despite our number, Mr. Chairmen, our community has not been able to garner the respect or representation that we deserve. For instance, this last decade, the Hispanic population of New York, as validated by the 2010 Census, indicates that in New York City the Hispanic population is larger than the Italian, Irish, and Jewish population combined.

In the state of New York alone, the Hispanic population grew by 19.2%, which indicates that the time to draw more than a few Hispanic congressional districts is overdue.

It is a fact that Hispanics are under-represented in New York State; it is a fact that Hispanics are under-represented in New York City, a city with a significant Hispanic population, but with only two Hispanic congressional members who have been serving for over two decades already; these seats must be preserved at all costs.

If you take under consideration the fact that the New York City Latino community alone makes up approximately 30% of the entire city population, and the recent growth of the overall New York State population, which is 19.2%, you would conclude from these high percentages and growth of the Hispanic community, that we merit proportional political representation.

We in the Latino community have been challenging the U.S. Census population numbers because traditionally, without exception, the Census has been undercounting our community for as much as 10%.

Added to this undercount percentage, is the fact that many Latinos who are born in the U.S., and particularly in New York City, list themselves as either Caucasians or African-Americans. This is due to the fact that Hispanics reflect a rainbow of colors, yet we are not categorized by the U.S. Census as a racial group, but rather as an ethnic group. So whether you are Dominican, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Mexican or Puerto Rican, we are Hispanic Americans sharing a common language and a common heritage.

The importance of creating a new congressional district as the one we are proposing to you today, would encompass not only a 60% Latino population, but also would bring a greater understanding of cultural sensitivity, and meet pressing social and community needs that are particular to the NY Latino community, such as bilingual education, immigration, affordable housing, job opportunities, and among many other important matters, additional federal funding for our schools, hospitals, and Latino organizations.

Approving our proposal will guarantee full representation and respect for our Latino workers, our tax payers, our children, elderly, youngsters, men and women, families and all people residing in our growing community. Please approve this map and give our community a voice in Washington, DC. We urge you to afford our community the opportunity to ensure fair representation. Thank you!