



March 12, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
New York State Capitol Building  
Albany, New York 12224

RE: Remaining Seats on the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write regarding the two vacant seats on the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission (“Commission”). To date, not one Latinx person has been appointed or assigned to the Commission. LatinoJustice PRLDEF strongly encourages you and your colleagues to appoint a Latinx person to one of the remaining seats in order to ensure that the nation’s<sup>1</sup> and state’s<sup>2</sup> largest minority group is adequately represented.

LatinoJustice PRLDEF, founded in 1972 as the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, is a non-partisan national civil rights legal defense fund, headquartered in New York that champions an equitable society by protecting and defending the rights of the greater pan-Latino community in the United States. For over 48 years, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has advocated for and defended the constitutional rights and the equal protection of all Latinos under the law and has worked to secure the voting rights and political participation of Latino voters. We have been involved in state and federal litigation regarding Latino political representation and voting rights, including constitutional legal challenges to discriminatory redistricting plans or those otherwise implicating voting rights.

Given the political climate, we are particularly concerned about redistricting and the impact it will have on Latinx political power and representation in New York State and throughout the country. Latinx’s between the ages of 16 to 24 account for the highest plurality of U.S. citizens<sup>3</sup> – the largest of any minority group – and as previously noted, the Latinx community is the largest ethnic minority group in New York State. Specifically, more than 3.7 million<sup>4</sup> New Yorkers are Latinx, representing nearly 20 percent of the state’s population.<sup>5</sup> As such, it is crucial for a Latinx person to have a seat on the Commission.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/31/where-latinos-have-the-most-eligible-voters-in-the-2020-election/> (last visited, March 12, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/New-York/New-York/Race-and-Ethnicity> (last visited, March 12, 2020)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/13/key-facts-about-young-latinos/> (last visited, March 12, 2020)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/fact-sheet/latinos-in-the-2016-election-new-york/> (last visited, March 12, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/states/state/ny> (last visited, March 12, 2020).



Redistricting only occurs once a decade. It is, therefore, imperative that the process is fair and accurate, and reflects the demographics of the surrounding communities. With respect to the composition of the Commission, we would be remiss if we did not highlight the impact that unconscious (or implicit) biases play when a Commission tasked with safeguarding New York's democracy does not have a single representative from New York's largest minority group within its inner-circle.

Without at least one Latinx person on the Commission, Latinx New Yorkers will be at a greater risk of losing their equal protection of "one person, one vote" under reapportionment principles of the New York and U.S. Constitutions. This is not just about good optics. The substantive knowledge that at least one Latinx person on the Commission would bring to its deliberations about the nuances of living in New York State more than warrant inclusion, no exclusion of this vital segment of the State's population.

In sum, LatinoJustice PRLDEF urges you and or your colleagues to appoint a Latinx person to one of the two remaining seats on the Commission. We also welcome the opportunity to meet and or discuss this matter in person or virtually and/or make recommendations of potential Latinx's to sit on the Commission.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Juan Cartagena". The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Juan Cartagena  
President & General Counsel  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jorge Luis Vasquez, Jr.". The signature is more legible than the one on the left, with clear lettering.

Jorge Luis Vasquez, Jr.  
Associate Counsel  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF

cc:

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senate Majority Leader  
The Honorable Carl Heastie, Assembly Speaker  
The Honorable William A. Barclay, Assembly Minority Leader  
Members of the New York Independent Redistricting Commission