

Statement of Maria Teresa Feliciano
President of The Dominican American National Roundtable

Hearing of the NJ Redistricting Commission
City of Lynn, MA
Monday, June 23 2011

Members of the Massachusetts Special Joint Committee on Redistricting:

On behalf of the Dominican American National Roundtable, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the redistricting of Massachusetts' 217 Legislative Districts.

The Dominican American National Roundtable is a national organization founded in 1997 with the mission of representing and advocating for the educational, economic and civil rights of the over 2 million Dominicans in the United States.

We understand that the issue before this Committee is the redistricting of Massachusetts' 9 Congressional districts, 40 senatorial and 8 councilor districts, and 160 representative districts, and would like the commission to consider the following, in their quest to design maps that would lead to accurate representation of all of Massachusetts' communities. A map that would reflect the will of the electorate, provides minorities with appropriate representation, and keeps communities of interest together.

Back in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson went before an extraordinary joint session of Congress to urge speedy passage of an effective voting rights bill.

"I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy," Johnson began. "I urge every member of both parties, Americans of all religions and of all colors, from every section of this country, to join me in that cause."

"Their cause must be our cause, too," Johnson said. Subsequently, the White House drafted legislation that banned literacy tests, named federal vote registrars and imposed federal penalties on anyone who interfered with voting in local, state or federal elections. On Aug. 6, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law.

In a democracy, the principle of one person, one vote is a sacred concept. If the principle is to apply in Massachusetts, then ensuring a greater voice for Latinos in the halls of power is the greatest test facing this Special Joint Committee on Redistricting.

The new legislative map must reflect the state's changing demographics.

According to the 2010 US Census, in 2010, there were 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States, composing 16 percent of the total population. Hispanics increased by 15.2 million

(or 43%) between 2000 and 2010, which accounted for over half of the total population growth that occurred in the U.S. over the past 10 years.

The Census Bureau release specifically looked at the populations of Rhode Island, South Carolina, West Virginia, Michigan, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Maine and the District of Columbia – all which show explosive demographic growth of Hispanics. In Massachusetts, for example, the Hispanic population grew 46 percent since Census 2000. Hispanics accounted for 1 out of every 2 individuals added to the total Adult 18+ population in the state. Hispanics make up 10 percent of the state's total population and has grown to 15 percent of Western Massachusetts population.

The 2010 data regarding Hispanic residents revealed that Springfield, Holyoke and Chicopee have seen a significant rise in their Hispanic populations since the last count in 2000.

The population of Hispanics in Springfield increased to 59,541, or almost 39 percent of the city's population. That's up from 41,343 in 2000, when Hispanics constituted 27.2 percent of the city's population.

Lawrence has increased at the higher rate that the whole state of Massachusetts in the last 10 years, at 6% (from 72,043 to 76,377 people), while the State only increased 3.1%.

The emergence of Latinos as the largest minority in the state, as per the 2010 Census, requires the creation of Majority Latino Districts or Latino Opportunity Districts that will allow us to elect candidates of our choice in numbers commensurate with our population.

We propose two Lower Chamber Representative Legislative Districts that will help our Community of Interest of the City of Lawrence to elect their candidate of choice.

As a Community of Interest, the City of Lawrence shares much, well documented commonalities such as language, socio-economic status, educational achievements, religion, means of transportation, and sources of information, political interest, and cultural expression, among other factors. Lawrence, MA is very different to most of their surrounding populations and communities, such as Andover and North Andover, MA. Yet, it is represented by three different State Representatives. This multiple representation harms the ability of that community to elect a candidate of their choice

Representative Marcos Devers (D) – with 84.75% Hispanics

Representative David Torrisi (D) – with 33.71% Hispanics

Representative Paul Adams (R) – with 21.39% Hispanics

Both proposed State Representative Districts will have more than 60% and 70% Hispanic Population, respectively. Currently, Sixteenth Essex District has a Hispanic population of 84.75%.

We are proposing a State Senate seat that will have the highest percentage of Hispanics of any Senate seat in the State of Massachusetts (with 44%) and the second highest percentage of minorities (48.9%). This proposed district will combine the Spanish Speaking (community of interest) Population of Lawrence and Haveville into one State District. Currently, the Second Essex & Middlesex Districts are 35.30% Hispanic and the First Essex District is 10.93% Hispanic. The Proposed new district will be 44% Hispanic and will unite communities of interest in Matuen, Lawrence and Haveville.

Massachusetts needs to have an Electoral Map that respects and unifies Communities of Interests. Lawrence gives this Special Joint Committee on Redistricting the opportunity to create two state representative districts and one senate district that uphold the spirit of the Voting Rights Act.

There is undisputed lack of Hispanic representation in the Massachusetts General Court. There is only one Hispanic State Senator and 4 State Representatives. Considering that Hispanics are 9.6% of the population in the State of Massachusetts, to achieve fair presentation of Hispanics, this Special Joint Committee on Redistricting would need to create no fewer than 4 State Senate and 10 State Representative Hispanic seats.

This Special Joint Committee on Redistricting should consider creating Legislative Districts in the area we highlighted, as the Voting Rights Act provides for keeping together the votes of minority groups in districts that they may elect candidates of their choice.

In a democracy, the principle of one person, one vote is a sacred concept. It should apply in Massachusetts, ensuring a greater voice for Latinos in the halls of power.

We look forward to working with the Committee to contribute in your effort to make sure that Massachusetts achieves a fair and constitutional redistricting.

Thank you,

Maria Teresa Feliciano, President
Dominican American National Roundtable

About DANR

The Dominican-American National Roundtable (DANR) is a non-partisan, non-profit corporation seeking to bring together the different voices of all people of Dominican origin in the United States. DANR is a national forum for analysis, planning, and action to advance the educational, economic, legal, social, cultural, and political interests of Dominican Americans. It aims to ensure for U. S. Dominicans the full exercise of the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States of America. With those objectives in mind, DANR is committed to enriching the quality of life in the United States by highlighting the contributions of Dominicans to the larger American society.