



May 26, 2022

**Testimony to the Districting Commission of the City of New York
Prepared for delivery on Thursday, May 26, 2022
Delivered by Orlando R. Ovalles, Northeast Director of Civic Engagement**

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Orlando Ovalles and I am the Northeast Director of Civic Engagement for the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund. Our organization is the nation's leading non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates full Latino participation in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. We are now advocating across the nation for redistricting processes which result in maps that provide Latinos and other under-represented groups with a fair opportunity to elect leaders who are responsive and accountable to their communities.

We greatly appreciate the New York City Districting Commission's thoughtfulness and commitment to a participatory process now and the months to come as you gather public input. We want to provide recommendations on 1) how the commission can ensure the public has meaningful opportunities to provide public input on the Commission's maps; and 2) the criteria the Commission should comply with when developing its maps.

We urge the Commission to conduct an accessible, inclusive, and transparent redistricting process. Our communities deserve a fair shot to provide feedback while engaging with the redistricting process. As you get ready to draft maps, we respectfully request the Commission to conduct the line drawing phase of the maps in public and continue seeking public input throughout the process. We urge the Commission to hold hearings in every borough of New York City and to schedule some of them during hours outside the 9AM to 5PM traditional business hours to allow access to a greater number of New Yorkers who might not be able to attend otherwise.

Language inaccessibility is just one of many historical barriers to civic participation in the Latino community. For the Commission to have the best possible information about communities of interest (COIs) and related issues, it is imperative that residents be able to understand and participate in the Commission's activities even if they have limited English proficiency. For this reason, providing interpretation and translation support for Latinos and other language minorities in the city is crucial. We recognize that the Commission's website is supported by Google to allow visitors to translate webpages into their language of choice, however we recommend that the Commission consider allowing members of the public to submit their

testimony in languages other than English. Meaningful engagement with the public requires a two-way flow of information.

Furthermore, it is critical that the maps that result from this redistricting process comply with the provisions set forth in the U.S. Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act. To meet these requirements the Commission's maps must reflect the growth of the Latino community in the city over the last decade. According to data from the 2020 Census, the Latino share of New York City's population is 28.9 percent. Latinos represent 56.4 percent of the population in the Bronx, 28.2 percent in Queens, 25.6 percent in Manhattan, 18.9 percent in Brooklyn and 18.6 percent in Staten Island. Throughout the State of New York, Latino population growth outpaced the overall population increase between 2010 and 2020, with the state's overall population growing by 4.2 percent and its Latino population growing by 15.5 percent. In the Bronx for example, the Latino population grew by 8.8 percent, while the borough's overall population growth was 3.5 percent. The maps must ensure that Latinos achieve fair representation by having the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice through the new district lines. The Commission must also abide by the New York City Charter's Chapter 2-A, which sets forth the provisions for its operations.

Finally, we recommend for the Commission to draw lines that respect Latino communities of interest (COIs). These lines must keep communities together that share similar needs and concerns.

We hope that these recommendations will be useful and seriously considered in the Commission's efforts during this redistricting process for the City of New York. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a testimony and your attention to our comments. We look forward to continuing our work together to ensure a fair and transparent redistricting process in all of New York City.