



TESTIMONY To The New York State Complete Count Commission  
Hostos Community College  
500 Grand Concourse  
Bronx, NY 10451

Monday, March 11, 2019

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SUBJECT: Ensuring that the Dominican community receives a fair and accurate count in the  
2020 Census.

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for hosting this hearing to make sure that the diverse communities of New York are counted in the upcoming 2020 Census. We hope that our testimony can provide insight into the challenges we expect to face within the Dominican community, and the strategies that we believe offer an opportunity to fully engage this community in the census. We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspectives with the commission on this subject.

### **Background**

Dominicanos USA (DUSA) is a 501c3 organization, founded in 2013 in the South Bronx. When we first launched, our goal was to register, educate, and mobilize Dominican-Americans to vote. To date, we have successfully registered over 155,000 mostly Dominican voters in New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and a several other Northeastern States. We conducted our voter registration efforts in part by using a one-of-its-kind "Dominican model", developed in part with the data firm Catalist, that is able to identify likely Dominicans on an individual and household basis. This work has resulted in the richest dataset of Dominican-Americans by any organization in the United States.

Through our "get-out-the-vote" efforts, we have been able to contact voters a total of more than 750,000 times through door knocks, phone calls, text messages, and direct mail to mobilize them for Special, Primary, and General Elections, at the State, Local, and Federal levels. The voters we have mobilized have also been much more likely to be *low-propensity voters* or the voters historically least likely to vote, because they have tended to be younger, more likely to be foreign-born, speak English as a second language, and/or come from a low-income community.

Despite this fact, our work has been able to increase the participation rate amongst the voters we engaged far beyond the level seen by other voters in the same geographic areas.

After achieving some success with registering, educating, and mobilizing our community to vote, we expanded our scope of work to include advancing the civic, social, and economic integration of Dominicans in the US. Beginning in 2016, we began addressing another major gap in the full civic participation of Dominican-Americans: Naturalization. We launched the DUSA Citizenship program and joined the New Americans Campaign, a nationwide collaborative of organizations dedicated to mobilizing Lawful Permanent Residents to become US Citizens. Over the past two years, with the help of our partners such as the NALEO Education Fund, and through savvy re-engagement with individuals in our database, we have assisted over 1,000 green card holder with their path to citizenship, including determining if they are eligible and providing application assistance.

Starting in July of this year, we began addressing the need for workforce development within our community by partnering with multiple public and private stakeholders to launch an initiative to connect foreign-born New Yorkers living in Northern Manhattan with employment and training opportunities, as well as other skill-building and career advancement resources.

Besides promoting civic, social, and economic integration, what these programs share in common is our dedication to serving as a conduit for our community, connecting them with resources, services, and information that will assist them with those same goals. It is for this reason that we believe it is absolutely vital to engage our community in the 2020 Census and to address any barriers to their full participation before it is too late.

### **Dominican-Americans and the 2020 Census**

According to 2017 estimates from the Census Bureau, there are 2,081,419 Dominicans or people of Dominican descent living in the United States, with 1,162,568 or 56% of them being foreign-born. In New York State and New York City, the population estimates are 872,504 and 720,020 respectively, with the foreign-born populations at 514,999 (59%) and 441,182 (61%). The 720,020 Dominicans in New York City account for more than one of every nine City residents (12%) and they also account for 29% of Latinos in the City. The 355,494 Dominicans in the Bronx account for nearly one of every four (24%) and almost half (43%) of the Latino Borough residents, making the Bronx the US county with by far the largest Dominican population. Recent data suggests that Dominicans are the largest immigrant group and largest national-origin/sub-group in New York City. It is not possible to achieve a full and accurate count in Census 2020 without ensuring that Dominicans are counted. Below are the latest estimates for Dominican populations by State and County:

Top US States by Dominican Population (2017):

State	Latinx Total	Dominican Total	Dominican Foreign-born
New York	3,811,654	872,504	514,999
New Jersey	1,840,433	301,655	186,118
Florida	5,370,860	259,779	137,293
Massachusetts	811,292	172,577	92,689
Pennsylvania	938,428	127,505	68,924

Top US Counties by Dominican Population (2017):

State	Latinx Total	Dominican Total
Bronx County, New York	826,176	355,494
New York County, New York	435,002	173,723
Queens County, New York	660,550	99,667
Essex County, Massachusetts	165,108	86,539
Kings County, New York	506,635	85,999
Miami-Dade County, Florida	1,887,266	83,832
Passaic County, New Jersey	214,611	69,024
Hudson County, New Jersey	298,373	52,510
Providence County, Rhode Island	145,320	49,755
Suffolk County, Massachusetts	183,025	44,773
Westchester County, New York	243,720	44,736
Middlesex County, New Jersey	178,504	44,593
Broward County, Florida	574,026	42,742
Bergen County, New Jersey	189,053	35,079
Suffolk County, New York	291,778	31,530

As has happened every 10 years since 1950, New York State will likely lose at least one Congressional seat after the 2020 census takes place due to relative population loss, meaning that communities will need to work even harder to ensure that they are represented and their needs are met within ever larger, more populous, congressional districts. Communities like ours are consistently more susceptible to being undercounted in the census, making it more likely they will be packed into larger, less responsive districts, including at the state and local levels, in addition to the congressional level.

Census data determines federal funding to meet critical community needs such as health care, education, transportation, housing, and many others. Policy makers also rely on this information to inform decisions like where to build new schools or roads. These factors make it even more important to ensure that we get a valid count in the 2020 Census.

Our track record demonstrates that we are well-equipped to meet this monumental challenge, based in part on our insight into, and connection with, the Dominican-American community that is represented in large numbers throughout New York. We also have an unmatched familiarity with the neighborhoods where they live, from years of knocking on over 150,000 doors to speak with residents and developing a rich database around this population.

### **Challenges to obtaining a full count in 2020**

There are numerous challenges that could make a fair and accurate 2020 Census more difficult in our community. We have identified several of them below, although this list is in no way exhaustive. Many of these issues have been barriers for civic engagement and naturalization in the Dominican community, which gives us some insight into how they may impact this population's participation in the upcoming census.

#### Gentrification and Displacement

Rising housing costs have been a problem in New York City for years, and working-class immigrant communities like Dominicans are often the most at risk to be displaced. A report from the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute<sup>1</sup> outlines how Dominicans have been displaced at an alarming rate from the traditional enclave of Washington Heights due to rising housing costs and gentrification. According to the report, the percentage of Dominican households who were rent-burdened (spending over 30% of their income on rent) increased from 40% to 48% from 1999 to 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://dominicanlandmarks.com/Housing-Policy-Brief.pdf>

Eviction data from Pro Publica<sup>2</sup> also shows that our community has been acutely affected by the housing crisis in New York City. By looking at the geographic distribution of evictions on a map, you can see an “Eviction Corridor” that spans Northern Manhattan and the West Bronx, which overlaps with the largest concentration of Dominicans in the region. This displacement will make a population that is already difficult to count for various reasons even harder to count.

### Overcrowding

Another consequence of the housing crisis in New York has been overcrowding, defined as more than one person for every room in a home. According to data from the NYC Comptrollers Office<sup>3</sup>, “The largest proportion of crowded dwellings observed in New York City was in the Bronx, where 12.4 percent of all dwelling units were crowded in 2013, up from 11.1 percent in 2005.” In addition, the report stated that “From 2005 – 2013, the rate of severe crowding (more than 1.5 persons per room) rose by 78.7 percent in the Bronx, an increase of 12,297 severely crowded apartments.”

A separate report from The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness<sup>4</sup> looks at the data on a neighborhood-level and finds that the neighborhoods of Northern Manhattan and the West Bronx, places where the largest number of Dominicans call home, experience the highest rates of overcrowding in the city. This creates a problem for a valid census count because renters may hesitate to share how many people live in their household if they live in an apartment that has been illegally subdivided or overcrowded for some other reason.

### The Citizenship Question/Immigration Status

We are concerned that the Citizenship question and the overall climate of fear for immigrants will discourage many in our community from participating in the census. The majority of Dominicans in the US are foreign-born and the share of households with at least one foreign-born member is even higher. We have seen an uptick in the level of insecurity that even documented immigrants and green card holders feel about their immigration status. This may translate into lower compliance with the 2020 Census, thus jeopardizing the accuracy of the data for the next 10 years.

### Language

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<sup>2</sup> <https://projects.propublica.org/evictions/#11/40.7872/-74.0167>

<sup>3</sup> [https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Hidden\\_Households.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Hidden_Households.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>

[http://www.icphusa.org/new\\_york\\_city/on-the-map-the-dynamics-of-family-homelessness-in-new-york-city/overcrowding/](http://www.icphusa.org/new_york_city/on-the-map-the-dynamics-of-family-homelessness-in-new-york-city/overcrowding/)

English language proficiency remains a challenge in our community. According to Census data tabulations by Pew Research<sup>5</sup> 64% of foreign-born Dominicans report speaking English less than very well, while 53% are Spanish-dominant. If the Census Bureau does not make an effort to reach people in the languages they feel most comfortable in, especially by hiring staff who are able to communicate in those languages, then it will not be possible to achieve a fair and accurate census.

### Poverty & Digital Literacy

The share of Dominicans in the US who live in poverty, 28%, is higher than the rate for the general U.S. population (16%) and slightly higher than the rate for Hispanics overall (25%). Those in poverty often lack broadband access at home or access to a home computer. In addition, we have experienced through our work the difficulty for many in our community with digital literacy. We often find that individuals seeking resources do not have an email to be able to access services.

### **Conclusion**

The decennial Census is a cornerstone of our Democracy and constitutionally mandated. We know that in addition to redistricting, the census also impacts government funding levels to meet vital community needs, as well as other important public policies. It is our commitment to making certain that we receive a full and accurate count.

Community-Based Organization must join with willing partners to address the many challenges our communities face in being counted so that we can ensure that we have a fair and reliable 2020 Census.

Thank you for hosting this hearing and for inviting us to speak with you today.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/15/hispanics-of-dominican-origin-in-the-united-states-2013/>