



LATINO ACTION NETWORK

TESTIMONY BY
THE LATINO ACTION NETWORK
BEFORE THE NEW JERSEY STATE APPORTIONMENT COMMISSION
MARCH 11, 2011

DELIVERED AND SUBMITTED BY:

Frank Argote-Freyre, President
Latino Action Network
P.O. Box 943
Freehold, NJ 07728
Phone: 908-670-0552
frankfreyre@yahoo.com

My name is Frank Argote-Freyre, and I am the President of the Latino Action Network, a broad, statewide coalition of Latino organizations dedicated to political empowerment, the promotion of civil rights, and the elimination of disparities in the areas of education, health, and employment.

I want to first thank all of the Commissioners for the opportunity to testify here today. The Latino Action Network and many other groups asked for these hearings at the earlier round of public hearings, and you listened. My understanding is that this is the



second day of hearings after the Commission declared an impasse between the parties. We very much appreciate this opportunity for additional public involvement in the process.

We testified extensively at the earlier hearings about the dangers of both packing - concentrating large numbers of people of color in a small number of districts in a way that dilutes overall political power of our communities - and cracking - dividing communities of interest over multiple districts to the point that we have little or no influence in any district. We continue to urge the commission to avoid both packing and cracking.

At this point in the process, we recognize that a lot will come down to negotiations between the commissioners sitting in conference rooms with laptop computers, moving lines around on maps and calculating numbers. And it is that part of the process to which I address my remarks today.



I know it can be very tempting, especially sitting around a conference table with computers and maps, to make numbers king. To say that a district that is 50% Latino is better than 49% Latino is better than 48% Latino.

But to focus just on numbers does not do justice to our communities. You cannot see from the numbers alone which communities of interest are connected so closely that to divide them would seriously compromise our ties — and which communities might be adjacent on the map but worlds away in practice. You cannot see where there is a large Latino population that has experienced significant hostility from the surrounding community — and where there are strong cross-racial ties that can lead to the election of a candidate of choice.



All of those things can make a bigger difference in our ability to elect a candidate of choice than a few percentage points here or there. I'll give you an example. Newark and Jersey City border each other on the map. And I'm sure you could draw some great-on-paper district that was 50% or 60% Latino by combining parts of Newark and Jersey City, or Newark and Elizabeth. But the Latino community in Newark really doesn't share community institutions with the Latino community in Jersey City. There are few common community groups or political institutions. And so that great on paper district would probably become a fight between two communities with no history of working together, praying together, or building community together.

So that's what you shouldn't do. Let me tell you what you should do - using my home county, Monmouth, as an example. Monmouth County has seen strong growth in the Latino community since 2000 - some of the higher rates of growth in the state. For example, Freehold Borough's percentage of Latinos went



from 28% to 43% and Red Bank's from 17% to 34%. Freehold, Red Bank, Long Branch, and Asbury Park are the four key centers of the Latino community in Monmouth County. And there are strong ties between the communities in Freehold, Red Bank, Long Branch, and Asbury Park. These communities share a common heritage, common community institutions.

Every year the Latino residents of Monmouth County gather for a festival in downtown Freehold during Hispanic heritage month to celebrate the diverse communities that make up the Latino community. I am also the Director of the Latino Coalition, an umbrella organization of Latino organizations, primarily in Monmouth County and I can attest to the close bonds and commonality of interests between these communities.



Right now the Latino community in these key communities is cracked into 2 districts, the 11th and 12th. As such, there is insufficient ability in any of these districts for the community to even influence the election of a candidate of choice.

In the new map, we ask that Freehold, Red Bank, Long Branch, and Asbury Park all be in the same district. Other towns in the district in addition to Asbury Park, Freehold, Long Branch, and Red Bank would include Allenhurst, Colts Neck, Deal, Eatontown, Interlaken, Loch Arbour, Neptune Twp., Ocean Twp., Shrewsbury Borough, Shrewsbury Twp., Tinton Falls, and West Long Branch. Several of these communities such as Eatontown and Tinton Falls also have significant Latino communities connected to the broader Latino community in Monmouth County.

I know that it's harder to look at the world based on on-the-ground communities than to just look at pure numbers. But it's the



right thing to do, as we're going to have to live with these maps for the next decade. And it's what the law requires - looking at communities of interest as a key factor in redistricting.

To sum up, we expect that a fair map will give more Latino communities the opportunity to elect the candidates of our choice than has happened under any previous map in New Jersey. We think this is a reasonable expectation based on the growth the Census numbers have shown in so many places throughout the state over the past decade, and will likely to continue to show throughout this decade. But in order to really figure out what is fair, you need to look beyond the numbers to the realities on the ground.

We hope you will listen to those realities throughout these hearings, and accordingly, come up with a map that truly represents all of New Jersey.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Statement of Jackie Cornell-Bechelli, Legislative/Political Director
www.njcitizenaction.org

Before the 2011 New Jersey Apportionment Commission

March 11, 2011 Public Hearing – Atlantic City, New Jersey

Good morning Commissioners. My name is Jackie Cornell-Bechelli and I am the Legislative/Political Director for NJ Citizen Action, the State's largest, independent citizen watchdog organization representing over 60,000 family members and 100 affiliated and allied labor, senior, tenant, environmental, civil rights, faith based, civic, housing, faith based and neighborhood organizations across the State. For our 28 year history we have worked to improve the lives of working families and seniors through issue advocacy and civic engagement campaigns and to insure that government responds to the needs of ordinary residents, not just those with money and power. And this is why we are here today.

We commend the Commission for holding multiple public hearings throughout this process and we think it is particularly important these hearings include you Professor Rosenthal who, as the tie breaking member of this bi-partisan Commission - you have a big job to do. We look to you to represent all of us, not one of the two major political parties, and through your independent, non-partisan role, represent the democratic principles embedded in the constitutional requirements of the redistricting process, particularly the simple yet powerful bed-rock principle of one-person, one-vote.

We continue to call for public hearings where voters have an opportunity to comment on actual proposed district maps and urge you to schedule these as soon as possible.

We urge you to be open and transparent about your deliberations as one important measure by which you can earn a higher level of confidence from the vast majority of residents who will be impacted by your work and in our government and who cannot get to a public hearing. While we recognize that public hearings, not required by any law, have been held and that the Commission has taken the positive step of hosting a website where basic information, meeting notices and hearing transcripts can be found, much more can and should be done. Today, unlike

any other time in history, we have the technology and communications tools to educate our residents about redistricting and provide an understanding of your decision making process. We call on you to provide the software on this site that would allow interested members of the public to draw maps, access written testimony, your own proposed maps and other resource materials being utilized by this Commission in your deliberations.

We are here today as well to comment on one aspect of this year's process that we find particularly troubling. For more than a decade New Jersey Citizen Action has worked to implement policies that limit the influence of special interest money in politics. We support public financing of elections and public financing of the redistricting process, which at its core is all about elections.

This year each 'side' of reapportionment commission has been provided with approximately \$500,000 of public funding to complete this work – and this should be enough. Recently the press has reported on a new group, the Center for a Better New Jersey, a Republican organization whose mission appears to be to influence this redistricting process – with money. According to the Star Ledger, "Republicans describe (the Center) as a think tank for drawing new district maps and giving interest groups a resource to draw their own." Some members of the Reapportionment Commission are also involved with this Center.

We recognize that re-districting is much about politics, but we cannot remember a time before this year when sadly, private money is being raised and used to try to influence the outcome of this process. NJ's Commission is already too much about Democrats and Republicans jockeying to pick their own voters. While this may or may not be the way of our current political landscape, we should not tolerate attempts to unduly influence an already difficult and insular process by having electeds from any party raise unlimited, undisclosed amounts of money to get a leg up on drawing their own election districts. Allowing some interests groups, because of their access to cash, to have the resources to draw maps, but not others because we lack access to wealthy donors, hurts the very democratic principles and outcomes we are trying to preserve in this process.

We plan to submit written testimony after we have an opportunity to review the maps. We stand ready to assist this Commission in your work and hope, along with many of NJ's residents, to be engaged in an open, transparent and accountable redistricting process. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon.

New Jersey Citizen Action is the State's largest, independent citizen watchdog organization, representing 100 labor, tenant, religious, community, women's, environmental, civil rights and senior organizations and 60,000 family members who live throughout New Jersey. For our entire organizational history we have worked to improve the quality of life for NJ's working families and seniors including fighting for guaranteed access to high quality and affordable health care for every resident.