

Hello and good afternoon,

My name is Joe Marchica, and I'm here both as a Hamilton, New Jersey citizen and as the co-chair of Our Revolution Trenton Mercer, a grassroots advocacy and activist organization that is part of a national network pushing for progressive policy, candidates, and change at all levels of government. And this inherently includes working to make New Jersey's democracy healthier.

Right now, New Jersey does NOT have a healthy democracy. To have that, our elections must be competitive, and not pre-decided. But even a decade after the last redistricting, the way New Jersey's districts were drawn still minimizes the number of competitive districts, preventing people's voices from clearly being heard.

We expected very few competitive elections back before election day. LD16 was expected to be hotly contested, but the vast majority of New Jersey's 40 legislative districts were seen as non-competitive. Now, 10 years of demographic changes since the last redistricting allowed for some surprises on election day, with a handful of incumbents losing. But this still meant that only 4 districts saw the incumbent party lose a seat: 2, 3, 8, 16. Add in three others that were closer than expected (11, 21, and 38), and we're up to 7. But this a DECADE since districts were drawn. It took THAT LONG to have only seven competitive elections, in 40 districts.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a healthy democracy. When we have so few competitive elections, people feel their vote doesn't matter. So they don't vote. To engage New Jerseyans in their government and elections, we must SHOW them their vote matters- not just tell them repeatedly how important it is. Otherwise, our words ring hollow.

Some data: LD16 was widely known to be competitive this year. Because of this, turnout in the LD16 Senate race was up 23% this year vs. 2017. Compare that to the governor's race, where turnout increased by only 19%. That 4% increase, applied statewide, would mean almost 90 THOUSAND more people voting.

Competitive elections are inherent to good government. They engage people with their local and state governments. Do you want more people to care about and support our government? It starts here. We MUST stop drawing virtually every district to not be competitive. When this is combined with the power that local party committees have to basically decide primary elections on their own by rigging the ballot, you end up cutting voters out of the process. Is it any wonder that the people of New Jersey are disengaged with our government, when we routinely show them that their vote doesn't matter?

Some closing points: Local party committee leadership is disproportionately white across the state. When these Committee Chairs select candidates, they disproportionately pick people who look like them. Then, because of how they rig the ballot layout by putting a stacked column on The County Line, these candidates win the primary. When districts are drawn non-competitively, these candidates win in the general election. So not only do people's votes not end up mattering, but we end up with a legislature that does not represent the diversity of New Jersey's population. 73.3% of the legislature is white, versus 54.6% of NJ residents (per the 2019 census). Meanwhile, only 2.5% of the legislature is Asian American Pacific Islander, versus about 10% of NJ residents. Only 7.5% of the legislature is Hispanic or Latino, versus 21.6% of NJ. I know you've heard a lot about the lack of diversity in the legislature, but I want to mention it here because this all ties together. Non-competitive districts mean

stagnation, and with predominantly white and male figures holding sway over county party committees across NJ, that means more overrepresentation for people who look like me, at the expense of people of color. New Jersey's legacy is rife with this systemic racism, and it's long past time that we take decisive action to change it.

So please, I urge you to do two things:

- 1) Draw fair, competitive districts that allow for a healthier New Jersey Democracy where voters' voices are actually able to decide their representatives, and hold them accountable
- 2) Draw districts that enhance, rather than diminish the voices of people of color in our government. They are as much New Jerseyans as you or I, and given our state's history of systemic racism, their voices must be heard.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> I considered Senate races withing 8 percentage points, or races where the incumbent party loses a seat, to be competitive elections.

Transcripts are on the website

Next public hearing wed dec 8<sup>th</sup>, virtual

Hello and Good evening,

My name is Victor Miguel Rivera and

Following the 2020 census count, New Jersey, -- along with the rest of the nation --- now undergoes the decennial redistricting and apportionment of its congressional and legislative map.

Having been born and raised in the capital county of Mercer and being represented in the 14 legislative district for as long as I can remember, I've grown up seeing Latino representation lag in top political appointments both in New Jersey and my hometown, despite us representing 21.6% of the statewide population. In fact, I represent the second fastest growing Latinx legislative district, with a 98% increase in the proportion of Latinos that make up district 14 reflected in the 2020 census.

I've seen out of touch politicians fail to amend the wounds of structural racism within the public education system even when the superintendent of my hometown defined it as "de facto segregation". Before everyone here today, I present my testimony to a commission composed of zero Latinos in a state where I'm represented by a legislature composed of only 8% Latinos. However, there is now an opportunity for NJ to put forward a fair and accurate redistricting effort that can respect the power of the Latino vote. This is especially important for a new generation of Latinx voters with Latinx youth comprising 21.8% of NJ's school-age children.

Despite the clear imbalance of economic prosperity and political representation between Latinos & whites in my home town, the redistricting process provides the opportunity to

build a more equitable, inclusive and fairer New Jersey, one in which Latinos have appropriate representation at the state and federal levels.

To be clear, I'm advocating for appropriate legislative districts. These districts must respect our communities of interest and ensure that our communities are neither "packed" nor "cracked," so that our influence is not diluted. There are opportunities to create greater Latino representation all over the great state of NJ. The number of Latinx communities in our state has only increased and spread out in the last decade, so with that I urge you to incorporate this growth into the future map, because Latinos are wide awake in the fight for fair representation in the Garden State.