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LatinoLines and New York's LatinoJustice Testify on Philadelphia's Seventh Councilmanic District

On Tuesday, August 16, 2011, LatinoLines, a non-partisan, expanding coalition of Latino leaders and civil rights activists, presented testimony in the first of Philadelphia City Council's hearings on redistricting.

Testifying for Latino Lines were Jose Oyola, also of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights. Jose Perez, Esquire of LATINOJustice-PRLDEF, the civil rights advocacy group from New York; former City Councilman of Philadelphia, Angel Ortiz, Esquire; and Joe Garcia via Wynne Alexander, of LatinoLines. Garcia is also Vice Chairman of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights (NCPRR).

LatinoLines experts and advocates testified that the United States census shows the Latino population increased by almost 60, 000 people in Philadelphia. Perez of LatinoJustice discussed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and how it specifically prohibits 'vote dilution,' 'fracturing,' 'cracking,' 'stacking,' and 'packing' of voters and districts. Testimony then showed how the Seventh Councilmanic District with its extremely peculiar shape, the fact that it combines communities with different interests and distant physical locations and is barely contiguous, make it a classic example of gerrymandering.

LatinoLines' presentation recounted the history of the Seventh District, presented maps going back to the 1960's, 70s, 80s and 90s to today's current map. Panelists detailed their studies and mapping procedures spanning the last five months, presenting a possible LatinoLines map which addresses the decades-old injustices in the Seventh District's boundaries. Without a fair, logical, compact and contiguous voting district, the Latino community is denied its natural voting power.

Testimony also centered on the large increase in Latino population naturally leading to a properly-mapped Seventh Councilmanic District with a 60% Latino population.

Testimony also highlighted the fact that the old maps show a much more logical set of borders for the Seventh District which included parts of the riverfront. It was noted, that if you just enclose the current areas of new Latino population growth, it naturally fits in the Seventh Councilmanic District and the city would have a reasonable, healthy and more economically viable Seventh District.

As the current legislative process on redistricting develops, brought about by the release of the 2010 census numbers, the LatinoLines Coalition is asking that Latinos finally have the representation in this century that they did not have in the last. We all know Philadelphia helped form this nation with the battle cry 'No taxation without representation.'

The city of the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall can no longer be the city that does not allow sectors of its citizens fair and equitable representation at the ballot box and seats of governmental power.

LatinoLines is urging that new lines be drawn to reflect the viable and growing Latino communities in Philadelphia. The new district should be properly compact and contiguous. The Latino vote should no longer be diluted because it is prohibited by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Eliminating this dilution assures the true strength of the Latino community's political voice and allows it to take its natural course among the leadership of the City of Philadelphia.

[The August 16, 2011 testimonies can be read in their entirety in the Background Section of LatinoLines.com]

LatinoLines

WHEN YOU PURPOSEFULLY DILUTE OUR VOICE, YOU TAKE AWAY OUR RIGHT TO HAVE A CHOICE