



INITIAL PUBLIC COMMENT ON REDISTRICTING

Submitted to the Colorado Independent Redistricting Commissions

by the

Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy, & Research Organization

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Summary

The following comments offer three recommendations to members and staff of both redistricting commissions.

1. Latino communities in what is now Colorado have been politically underrepresented and inadequately served by government since 1848. Redistricting commissions should give greater priority to recognizing and giving voice to Latino “communities of interest” as required by the Colorado constitution.
2. The U.S. Census Bureau acknowledges that Colorado’s rapidly growing Latino population has been under-counted in every decennial census. Use of previous census data for today’s preliminary maps will aggravate redistricting bias against Latino communities of interest.
3. Compared to political parties and other better-resourced interests, it takes more time for Latino communities across the state to respond to opportunities for public comment and testimony allowed by the redistricting commissions. Both commissions should extend public comment periods, keeping them open for the full duration of the redistricting process.

Latinos Comprise Underrepresented Communities of Interest

Latinos are a growing presence in Colorado. In 2010, one in five Coloradans were Latino. Today, Latinos are nearly one in four. The Colorado State Demographer projects that by 2050, Latinos will be one in three.¹

Latinos have been in Colorado a long time. Some can trace family roots here to the 1600s. The oldest municipality in the state is the town of San Luís where, like the state in general, Spanish has been spoken since before the arrival of Colorado's English-speaking settlers. A significant proportion of Colorado Latinos are descendants of former ranchers and farmers displaced from

their land and forced to live as migrants in subsistence occupations after U.S. seizure of half the territory of México, formalized by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Historic intolerance and discrimination by Colorado settlers from eastern states against persons of Mexican descent still affect life for Latinos in Colorado today. Although most Latinos in Colorado today are native-born U.S. citizens, too many other Coloradans treat Latinos like undocumented and undesirable immigrants. Traditional discrimination against Latinos since 1848 have had cumulative effects on generations that followed. Today, there are multiple political and economic disparities between Latinos and other Coloradans. Today, the resulting costs to Latino health, education, civic engagement, career opportunities, housing, safety, income security in old age, and dignity remain unacceptably high.

Today, Latinos in Colorado remain politically under-represented. Although the Latino Caucus in the Colorado General Assembly has grown in recent years, it still only comprises 13% of the legislature.² Many Latinos are politically disaffected.³ Latino U.S. citizens are less likely to vote than other Coloradans.⁴ Latinos were once again under-counted by the 2020 Decennial Census.⁵ Biased census data has continued to limit public services and economic opportunities for members of Colorado's Latino communities.^{6,7}

Under-representation still has costly consequences for Colorado Latinos. Latino children today are more likely to attend under-resourced, lower-performing public schools, especially in urban areas.^{8,9,10} They are less likely to graduate, and more likely to end up in lower-paying jobs.¹¹ Latino families tend to be segregated into lower-priced neighborhoods.^{12,13,14} They are less likely to own their own homes.¹⁵ They have less access to health care.¹⁶ Older Latinos lack retirement savings.¹⁷ Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Latinos of all ages have experienced higher rates of infection, serious illness, and death.¹⁸ Despite those well-documented disparities, Latinos remain less likely to be vaccinated.¹⁹

A large share of Latino U.S. citizens, like a majority of other U.S. citizens, are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants. But the political and economic disparities burdening Latinos in Colorado today are not simply the result of challenges immigrants sometimes face when trying to assimilate into our state's political, economic, and civic mainstream. In Colorado, areas south of the Arkansas River were once part of México. Since the end of the Mexican American War in 1848, generations of Latinos throughout Colorado and other southwestern states have had the added burden of overcoming persistent discrimination against racial, ethnic, and language minorities.

Concentration of Latinos in lower-paying segments of Colorado's labor force, and persistent educational and health disparities experienced by Latinos today, are exacerbated by a long-standing tradition of political under-representation of Latino communities of interest among state and local policymakers. CLLARO therefore urges the redistricting commissions to prepare and adopt maps allowing Latino U.S. citizens their full measure of influence when exercising their right to vote.

Out-of-Date Census Data Is Biased Against Latino Communities of Interest

The Colorado General Assembly is currently considering SB21- 247, a bill that would temporarily redefine the Colorado statutory definition of "necessary census data" used for redistricting purposes. It is unclear whether the bill, if signed into law, would survive judicial review. The bill appears intended to expedite drafting of preliminary maps prepared for the redistricting commissions by nonpartisan staff. The bill would allow timely completion of tasks preparatory to general elections in 2022. SB21-247 appears intended to reduce redistricting delays caused by late arrival this year of U.S. Census tabulations and block-level data.

CLLARO is alarmed at the amount of discretion SB21-247 would allow the commissions and their staff when choosing data sets on which to base preliminary maps. The bill would allow the commissions to use unspecified "other population data and demographic data from federal or state sources."

CLLARO is alarmed because most available "other data" understate the size and geographic distribution of Colorado's rapidly growing Latino population. For example, what would happen if preliminary maps used out-of-date data from the 2010 Decennial Census? The 2010 Census found 71,965 Latinos in Weld County, which amounted to 28% of the population. However, the Colorado State Demographer forecasts that the 2020 census should find 109,875 Latinos, amounting to 33% of the population, primarily in northern Weld County.

During the 2020 Census, CLLARO examined on-line maps of census tracts that had been undercounted by the 2010 Census, according to research by the U.S. Census Bureau. The maps were prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau and independent researchers at the City University of New York (CUNY). In Colorado, census tracts with the lowest census response rates (i.e., highest undercounts) were generally tracts with higher proportions of Latino residents.

CLLARO responded by conducting grassroots census outreach campaigns in some of those undercounted tracts, to encourage higher response rates. During the census, because the Census Bureau provided updates daily to researchers at CUNY, CLLARO could observe higher response rates after our campaigns in the tracts we targeted. However, we were limited by available funds and the unexpected shortening of time for field work by the Census Bureau. Evidence suggests that while CLLARO did succeed in increasing response rates in some tracts, many other Latinos in Colorado were left uncoun ted, as in previous censuses.

Although we expect that the State Demographer's estimates of Latino populations are too low, we urge the commissions and their staff to give careful consideration of the Demographer's forecasts for 2020. Simply relying on older data sets, such as block data from the 2010 Census, would understate the proportion of Latinos among Colorado residents to an even greater extent, and would miss the rapid recent growth of Latino communities in places like northern Weld County.

The U.S. Census Bureau acknowledges that it undercounts Latinos at far higher rates than other Coloradans. Given the increasing weight given Latino and other "communities of interest" in constitutional redistricting requirements, redistricting commissions should not rely on older data that disproportionately understates Latinos' growing presence in a growing number of areas across the state.

Public Comment Should Be Invited Throughout the Redistricting Process

Limited time periods for public comment and testimony before the commissions put Latino communities at a disadvantage. Colorado's major political parties already have a long-standing organizational capacity for mobilizing comments and testimony. Other communities of interest, like business groups, agricultural producers, and other interest groups have well-established associations capable of mobilizing members to contribute their groups' views.

Latino communities of interest lack such resources. CLLARO is researching and compiling a growing list of Latino community-based organizations throughout Colorado. We have counted 114 such organizations thus far. Some are charitable nonprofit corporations serving local low-income Latino residents. Others are unincorporated or informal voluntary associations. Except for a few Latino nonprofits in the Denver metro area, almost none have analytic expertise, but most are concerned about their local communities' lack of political, electoral, and public policy influence.

CLLARO will do what we can to inform Latino community-based organizations across the state of issues and opportunities concerning redistricting. However, we need more time. Compared to political organizations and other better-resourced interests, it will take more time for Latino communities across the state to respond to the opportunities for public comment and testimony allowed by the redistricting commissions. We urge both commissions to extend public comment periods. We ask that opportunities for comment and testimony remain open for the full duration of the redistricting process.

About CLLARO

The mission of CLLARO is to empower Latinos through leadership development, advocacy, and policy research to strengthen Colorado. Throughout our 57-year history, CLLARO has worked to help low-income Latinos empower themselves, both economically and politically. CLLARO's current program priorities are education opportunity and equity, access to health care, improved social determinants of health, and increased Latino civic engagement.

When CLLARO was founded in Denver in 1964, the city's neighborhoods, labor market, churches, and public schools were more strictly segregated than they are today. Latinos had long been discouraged from voting since the state was founded. In 1964, there were almost no Latino public officials. This had been true for the entire state since before its admission to the union.

Our vision for the future is a State of Colorado where Latinos achieve their fullest potential. CLLARO programs and activities serve that vision in the following ways.

- The CLLARO Capitol Fellowship Program provides public policy training to college students--typically the first in their families to attend college--and places them in paid internships with state legislators and other public officials and policy advocates.
- Our Parents Advocating for Public Schools (PALS) program trains low-income minority parents to help improve education resources and outcomes for their children who attend under-resourced public schools.
- The CLLARO Diverse Oral Health Coalitions program brings minority community organizations, oral health care providers, and public health agencies together to promote oral health education and prevention in minority communities and improve low-income family access to oral health care services.
- The Community Health Advocates Program (CHAP) trains volunteers to mobilize their Spanish-speaking neighbors to tackle social isolation of elders and other problems involving social determinants of health. (CHAP is suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.)
- CLLARO engages in non-partisan public policy research and advocacy. We are represented at the Colorado General Assembly by a professional lobbyist.
- In 2020, CLLARO conducted voter registration drives and GOTV campaigns in Adams, Denver, and Pueblo counties.
- Also in 2020, CLLARO used grassroots relational organizing methods and a social media campaigns to target Latinos residing in “hard to count” census tracts, to increase participation in the decennial U.S. Census.
- CLLARO expanded its services during the COVID-19 pandemic to help Latino individuals and families get tested and vaccinated, find affordable health care, and receive assistance with a wide range of problems related to the pandemic’s disproportionately large economic impacts on Latinos. We help affected Latinos experiencing food insecurity, housing eviction, health or mental health problems, wage theft, or needs for protective services, by connecting them with trusted, culturally competent service providers.

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3. *Anecdotally, CLLARO voter registration and GOTV drives in the Eastside and Bessemer neighborhoods of Pueblo frequently encountered previously registered voters who were discouraged and saw no value in continuing to vote. Local elected officials in Pueblo told CLLARO that discouraged voters in those predominantly Latino neighborhoods are a growing problem.*
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