

## TESTIMONY FOR PUBLIC MEETING AND HEARING NEW YORK CITY CAMPAIGN FINANCE BOARD VOTER ASSISTANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016

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SUBJECT: To solicit voting experiences and recommendations from members of the public and our partners.

Good evening, My name is Eddie Cuesta and I am the Executive Director of Dominicanos USA (DUSA). I would first like to start off by thanking the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee (VAAC) for holding this public hearing and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you all today about our experiences doing voter outreach with the Dominican-American community. I would also like to congratulate the committee for their continued work in engaging voters and improving the voting process.

Dominicanos USA is a non-partisan organization dedicated to empowering the Dominican-American community and the broader Latino community through voter registration, education and mobilization, as well as encouraging civic engagement at all levels. Since our inception, we have registered approximately 144,000 voters including about 110,000 voters in New York and about 34,000 in Rhode Island. We have also recently expanded into the states of New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. Our testimony will cover our Election Day

experiences of 2016, as well as our ideas for improving the voting process in New York, and our plans for the critically important 2017 elections in New York City.

Leading up to the November 2016 elections, Dominicanos USA partook in various voter registration activities. On Tuesday September 27th, DUSA proudly collaborated with NYC Votes in the participation in the fourth annual National Voter Registration Day, which was a historic success. On Thursday October 6th, DUSA also partnered with NYC Votes and the New York Immigration Coalition to participate in the second annual Student Voter Registration Day. For the event, the organization partnered with Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School and Independence High School, both alternative high schools in Manhattan. We served as facilitators to educate and engage the students about the importance of voting and civic engagement and assisted those who are eligible to vote fill out registration forms.

For the November 8th 2016 Elections we saw an historic turnout of Hispanic/Latino voters throughout the country who went out to vote. This unprecedented increase in Latino voter turnout is one the most important goals that we seek to achieve as an organization. For this past general election, DUSA organized a Get Out The Vote Campaign for New York and Rhode Island. Contrary to our previous campaigns, for this year's general elections we decided to put more emphasis on our phone banking operations to reach out to our registered voters more productively and efficiently. We did this by using our innovative phone banking system called Amicus, which allows us to make make over 50 calls per hour. We also worked with a smaller universe for door-to-door canvassing, which we still consider a vital component in reaching and engaging voters to go out and vote. We used our social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as well as our website (<a href="https://www.dominicanosusa.org">www.dominicanosusa.org</a>) to engage voters. Through these platforms, we shared important reminders and information about the voting process.

On Election Day, we offered transportation services to our enthusiastic elderly and the handicapped voters free of charge to help them get to the polls. We also offered voter protection services to voters at various poll site locations by assisting with and documenting cases of any inconveniences voters faced at their poll locations. Some of the cases we found of voters having difficulties on Election Day are outlined in a document which has been appended to the end of this testimony.

Earlier this past year, we also ran "Get Out The Vote" campaigns for other federal and state primaries in which we knocked on over 70,000 doors, sent out over 104,500 mail notifications and more than 62,500 door hangers/fliers and made approximately 112,600 phone calls, motivating the voters we had registered to get to the polls.

As previously stated, Dominicanos USA is an organization focused on voter mobilization, civic engagement and education. Part of these efforts include making the voting process more efficient and accessible for all New Yorkers. With the work that we do, we know first hand the obstacles many voters face during the election season and potential voters who want to register to vote. Therefore, we strongly believe that voting reform is essential to better civic engagement in future elections. We were a proud participant in Voter Day 2016 in Albany. During the course of that day, volunteers from DUSA and the Vote Better NY campaign met with lawmakers and engaged in a discussion with them that including asking for their support on legislations enacting online voter registration and registration updates, pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds, early voting, and ballot reform to make ballots easier to understand.

For 2017, we have very important elections coming up which include the mayoral elections and elections for the city council in New York City. Our goal for the new year is to continue civic engagement and voter outreach. We also want to find new and innovative ways to register voters to prepare for these upcoming elections, such as using texting apps to get information to voters. We know that there has traditionally been a large drop-off in voter turnout in New York City between presidential election years and the municipal elections the year after, but our plan will be to convert the new voters we mobilized this year into consistent voters for 2017 and years to come.

We are also helping create a new generation of Dominican voters in the U.S. by assisting eligible Dominican permanent residents become citizens through our "DUSA CITIZENSHIP" program. We are taking the same approach that led us to success in voter registration and are now mobilizing the Dominican American community to become U.S. citizens. This program is made possible with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. So far we have held 2 separate citizenship events at our South Bronx office, where we served about 20 individuals at each event, helping legal permanent residents with determining their eligibility and filling out there Naturalization paperwork if they qualify.

In conclusion, DUSA will continue to be a strong ally and partner for the VAAC and NYCCFB in their mission to engage New Yorkers in the electoral and civic processes of this great city of ours. Our efforts to register, educate, and mobilize Dominican American and Latino voters will continue in 2017 and for many years to come. We ask for the continued assistance of NYC Voters in this critical work.

Thank you for your time.

## Voter Protection Accounts: November 8th 2016 General Elections

R\*\*\*\*\* C\*\*\*\*: Poll site P.S. 28 - Stated that she felt discriminated against. She waited in line for about a half an hour, but a poll site worker let someone else skip in front of her because the person had a "ticket" to vote. The poll site worker stated that the ticket was given to the person because the books containing the names of voters had not arrived on time. The books did not arrive until 2 to 3 hours after the poll site opened.

E\*\*\*\*\* H\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* Poll site P.S. 28 - Stated that when she came in to vote earlier in the day, they had no one who spoke Spanish to assist. It was difficult to vote because of the language barrier. Our canvasser later discovered that the site had two people who spoke Spanish. However, they did not make themselves available.

M\*\*\*\*\* H\*\*\*\*\*\* Poll site P.S. 28 - Stated that there were no bilingual workers. However as previously stated, there were bilingual workers at the poll site. They did not make themselves available

## Poll site P.S. 28: overall problems

- Many problems regarding finding people in the books
- Although lines were short, they were slow.
- Poll site was very unorganized
- Poll site workers were not very well informed and could not answer simple questions
- Not enough scanners

**Poll site P.S. 306** - M\*\*\*\*\*\*, C\*\*\*\*\* could not find her name in the books. She was offered an affidavit ballot but refused. Stated that she preferred to not vote at all. A\*\*\*\*\*, P\*\*\*\* voted at P.S. 306 for this year's federal primaries without any problems. For the general elections, his name was not found and he had to vote through affidavit.

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