

Illinois Latino Agenda

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Promising Gains, Tempered Victories

Illinois General Assembly grants Latino gains while fracturing communities in maps released today

CHICAGO – May 27, 2011 – Leadership from the 49-member *Illinois Latino Agenda* is cautiously optimistic about gains in Latino representation included in legislative maps approved today by the General Assembly. Unprecedented collaboration among the *Agenda*'s diverse city- and suburban-based member organizations has influenced the creation of stronger Latino legislative districts throughout Metro Chicago.

“The new maps represent the growing influence of the Latino community—some advances were significant, some smaller, but all important in allowing Latino voters to effectively decide who will represent them in Springfield,” said Hipólito “Paul” Roldan, president of the board of directors for the Latino Policy Forum, the co-convener of the *Agenda*. “Significant among our successes was our unified effort itself. The *Agenda* represents agreement among nearly 50 diverse Latino groups—a strong, united voice representing a growing, diverse community.”

Providing testimony at more than 10 redistricting hearings across the state and collaborating with multi-ethnic coalitions in issuing a “Unity Map,” the *Illinois Latino Agenda* is pleased that weeks of advocacy efforts have generated gains in Latino representation in Springfield, including:

- Seven districts drawn with at least a 65 percent Latino population, reflecting the minimum threshold for Latino voters to elect the candidate of their choice, with an additional three districts created with a 60 percent Latino majority. Although the *Agenda* proposed 13 districts at a 65 percent Latino population, the current map reflects a gain over the status quo.
- The creation of the region's first Latino majority districts in the suburbs, which are home to 60-plus percent of Illinois Latinos. Even with the geographic dispersion of suburban Latinos, four suburban districts – Aurora, Elgin, Waukegan and Franklin Park – were drawn with at least 50 percent Latino populations, with boundaries closely mirroring those proposed by the *Agenda*.
- The inclusion of 17 influence districts with Latino concentrations from 20-49 percent. Such districts will allow diverse but important concentrations of Latino voters to have significant influence at the ballot box.

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These gains are tempered, however, by the fact that Latinos, Illinois' second-largest ethnic community and one of its fastest-growing population segments, will continue to be underrepresented in Springfield: Latino Policy Forum analysis indicates that if the two million-plus Latinos in Illinois were proportionately represented, there would be at least 28 Latino super-majority districts in the state legislature. However, analysis shows that geographic concentration would require 13 such districts.

Additionally, Latino leaders are upset that advances came unnecessarily at the expense of community cohesion. Despite the *Agenda's* advocacy to the contrary, lines were drawn through—not around—the predominately-Latino communities of Little Village, Back of the Yards, Cicero, Berwyn and Brighton Park. Fracturing these communities dilutes residents' ability to influence their legislators and improve their neighborhoods. Some of these districts, drawn extensively across municipalities, represent a threat to real representation for Latino communities.

“Outcomes were mixed, but the process itself shows promise: Latinos and other communities of color played a significant role in determining how these maps were drawn,” said Maria S. Pesqueira, President and CEO of Mujeres Latinas en Acción and member of the Illinois Latino Agenda. “Our next step is to turn these new district lines into actual representation. More representation for Latinos in Springfield is good for all of Illinois.”

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