

**TESTIMONY FOR ANNUAL PUBLIC HEARING
NEW YORK CITY CAMPAIGN FINANCE BOARD
VOTER ASSISTANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, May 17, 2016

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SUBJECT: The problems New York City voters experienced during the April 19th presidential primary; Experience advocating for election reform as part of the VoteBetterNY coalition

Introduction

Good evening everyone. My name is Eddie Cuesta and I am the New York State Director for Dominicanos USA or DUSA. Dominicanos USA is a non-partisan organization dedicated to empowering the Dominican-American and the broader Latino community through voter registration, education and mobilization, as well as encouraging civic engagement at all levels.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee for holding this hearing this evening and continuing their work in engaging voters and improving the voting process. We are still a new organization and we really appreciate the opportunities that NYC Votes has given us to share our experiences from doing voter outreach in the Dominican-American community. Our testimony today will cover our experiences doing GOTV for the April 19 Presidential Primary and also our experiences as participants on Voter Day 2016 in Albany.

We also want to speak in support of the findings from the Voter Assistance Annual Report. We are an organization whose work is focused on voter registration as well as mobilization and education. Therefore, Dominicanos USA fully supports VAAC in its goal of making voting easier for all New Yorkers. We believe voting and electoral reform is essential if we want to see greater civic engagement for all communities.

April 19 Presidential Primary in New York

On Tuesday April 19, New York State held its presidential primaries for the Democratic and Republican parties. These were big primary elections for both parties and the candidates were competing hard for votes. For two weeks before the election, the DUSA team was hard at work mobilizing voters to get out to the polls on Election Day, because we wanted to make sure that regardless of who won, our community was able to exercise its right to vote and have its voice heard.

Our team was at work day and night informing voters about the election date, the location of their respective polling site, the hours that polls will be open, and even how to get there. Voters were really excited and grateful to receive this information in their language from trusted community leaders at Dominicanos USA.

Using our database of the nearly 100,000 New Yorkers we have registered over the past two years, DUSA canvassers was able to knock on over 36,000 doors in the neighborhoods where the most Dominican-Americans live, and made over 53,000 phone calls to those we could not reach in person. Taken together, those door to door and phone bank efforts generated over 20,000 direct contacts with voters, and 85% of those contacts resulted in commitments to vote. In addition, we sent out over 53,000 mail notifications to voter all across New York State and posted reminders on social media for our followers. This broad based outreach is all part of Dominicanos USA's mission of taking Dominican-

American voter participation to levels never seen before. Dominicanos USA will continue its work mobilizing voters in the Dominican-American community and voters across New York.

Of course, on the actual day of elections, obstacles presented themselves to Dominican-Americans who wanted to vote. As reported in various media outlets during and after Election Day, many voters could not find their names in the poll books when they tried to vote, or found that their party affiliation had been changed without their knowledge. DUSA had seen these types of issues previously and was prepared to assist voters who faced these problems. DUSA trained poll-monitors were placed at 25 poll sites throughout Northern Manhattan and the Bronx where there is the highest traffic of Dominican-American Voters. While stationed at or outside these poll sites, our poll monitors diligently assisted all voters who could not vote or were asked to vote by affidavit. Many times these voters needed assistance finding their correct polling location or confirming their registration status and address. In one case a voters name could not be found in the poll book because the poll worker was looking in the wrong book.

DUSA also provided transportation to the polls for those voters who had difficulty getting to their polling location, including senior citizens and voters who used wheelchairs. It is because of these experiences that Dominicanos USA will continue to protect the right to vote for Dominican-Americans and all citizens who wish to be part of our democratic process in all elections, big and small. Including the upcoming congressional primaries on June 28.

Voter Day

As you may know Dominicanos USA was a proud participant in Voter Day 2016. We had 25 volunteers participate that day, and 6 of them served as team leaders for the meetings. Our team was so excited for the opportunity to meet with lawmakers that we were all waiting outside the DUSA office in

the rain at 5:30 in the morning to board the bus to Albany. It was an educational opportunity for our team to participate for meetings with New York State lawmakers to. The topic of discussion with the lawmakers was voting reform in order to make voting and voter registration easier for New Yorkers. Because of our experience in voter registration, voter mobilization, and voter protection, DUSA is well aware of the importance of reforming our election laws in order to facilitate voting, especially for Dominican-Americans and other Latinos who face additional barriers to voting.

During the course of the day volunteers from DUSA and the Vote Better NY campaign met with lawmakers and asked them to support legislation enacting online voter registration and registration updates, pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds, early voting, and ballot reform to make ballots easier for voters to understand. Some of the lawmakers even represented the same neighborhoods that DUSA has been working in for the past 2 years and knew of our work and the issues we care about, making it easier for them to relate to these reforms. This experience was, for our team, an opportunity to see the legislative process up close and be active participants in our democracy, while also taking steps to promote easier voting.