

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Members Day Hearing
Wednesday, May 1, 2019

Testimony of Congressman José E. Serrano (D-NY-15)

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Museum of the American Latino Act.

Today, nearly 58 million Latinos reside in the United States, or 18.1 percent of the population. By 2060, the U.S. Census estimates this population will reach 119 million, or 30 percent of the population. Latinos accounted for 25 percent of the nation's 54 million K-12 students in 2016, up from 16 percent in 2000. This young, vibrant, and growing community not only represents the future, but they also make up the largest and fastest growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S. Yet, Latinos still face systemic under-representation in nearly every facet of American life, especially within our arts and cultural institutions.

In 1994, Smithsonian acknowledged its shortcomings in Latino inclusion, so it issued a report setting forth ten recommendations to address it. While the Smithsonian has made good progress since that time, especially through the Latino Center's work, this is not enough. Relegating hundreds, if not thousands, of years of history to a single exhibit is unacceptable.

Efforts to establish a Latino Museum have been underway for some time. In 2003, former Representatives Xavier Becerra of California and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida introduced the first bill. In 2008, President Bush and Congress established the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the American Latino. The Commission issued its report in 2011 laying out a detailed plan for a world-class museum with a mission to illuminate the American Latino story for the benefit of all. This bill is a continuation of that hard work.

The National Museum of the American Latino Act would act on the Commission's report by establishing a Board of Trustees to work with the Smithsonian's Board of Regents to plan, design, and establish a National Latino museum on the National Mall. This legislation is modeled closely after past successful bills that have established new museums, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which has proven to be wildly successful for the Smithsonian and another marvel on the National Mall. This bill's funding model is in line with the establishment other Smithsonian museums: 50 percent private funds and 50 percent federal funds.

The contributions Latinos have made to American culture and history are innumerable, and often overlooked by the history books. From serving in our wars to influencing our economy, the arts, the sciences, and sports, it is time to share this history. That is why this bill is so important to so many. We will finally be able to see our history accurately reflected for the first time.

Thank you, again, for allowing me this opportunity. This is one of my highest priorities in the 116th Congress. I look forward to working with all of you to move this dream forward for so many of us in the American Latino community.