

**Written Statement of Eduardo Díaz, Director, Smithsonian Institution Latino
Center
Natural Resources Committee/Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
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Representative Haaland, Representative Young, Members of the Subcommittee, and Chair of the Natural Resources Committee Grijalva, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Eduardo Díaz and I have had the pleasure of serving as the director of the Smithsonian's Latino Center since 2008. The Smithsonian Latino Center was created in 1997 to promote Latino presence within the Smithsonian. The Center is not represented in one physical location; rather, it works collaboratively with the Institution's museums, research centers, record label, and traveling exhibition service, ensuring that the contributions of the Latino community in the arts, history, national culture, and scientific achievement are explored, presented, celebrated, and preserved. The Latino Center expands Latino presence throughout the Smithsonian by supporting research, exhibitions, collections, public and educational programs, digital content, leadership and professional development programs, recordings, and publications.

In addition, we continue the tradition of presenting programs celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month, Día de Muertos/Day of the Dead, and Pride. Our award-winning professional development program, Young Ambassadors, completed its 14th year this past summer. And, *¡Descubra! Meet the Science Expert* continues to proselytize STEM education and careers to Latino families in DC, Miami, Houston, Los Angeles and other cities.

If the Smithsonian is to fully serve 21st-century global audiences, through in-person visitation and digital outreach strategies, we will have to be more inclusive, more accessible, and more diverse. Cultural institutions are uniquely equipped to inspire, and we can magnify that ability when we truly reflect the rich tapestry of humanity. A critical part of making museums and programs more diverse is to include traditionally under-represented stories.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on HR 2420, a bill to create a National Museum of the American Latino within the Smithsonian Institution. If Congress deems it in the public interest to move forward with the creation of a Latino Museum, it is important, that any additions to the Smithsonian family do not impact Smithsonian's pressing infrastructure and collections space needs that demand our immediate and on-going attention. Despite our best efforts, much of Smithsonian's aging infrastructure continues to be below acceptable standards and any efforts for building and operating new physical infrastructure needs to consider this context in near and long-term. A new

museum would need federal funds for both the creation and long-term operations of the facilities, the care and preservation of our collections, and the general on-going success of the museum.

In the meantime, the Smithsonian will continue to work diligently to tell a broader and more complete narrative with the resources already at our disposal, with a commitment to secure additional resources to expand these stories.

Through the work of the Latino Center, we are experiencing unprecedented increases in the number of research projects, exhibitions, collections, public and educational programs, and digital content about the contributions of the Latino community. We do much of this work through allocations from the Latino Initiatives Pool, a federally supported initiative. We thank you and other members of Congress for this continuing support that ensures Latino presence throughout the Nation's museum.

Currently, we are preparing to unveil the first-ever Latino gallery to open on the National Mall – the Molina Family Latino Gallery – which will open in the National Museum of American History in fall 2021. This 4,500-square-foot gallery will present changing exhibitions detailing the complexity of the Latino experience and be available to the 20 million visitors who visit the National Mall on an annual basis. Latino History is American History. The Molina Gallery will present stories of discovery, identity, migration, innovation, entrepreneurship and success to millions of diverse, intergenerational audiences. This gallery has already received major support from several private funding sources.

The Smithsonian Latino Center is committed to delivering a compelling museum experience, accessible to all. In addition to delivering bilingual content, the Molina Family Latino Gallery will be accessible to those visitors with physical, sensory and cognitive challenges. This commitment to inclusive design requires that we make full and creative use of contemporary digital technologies. Importantly, we have set aside one-fifth of the gallery for a multi-use educational and public program space to encourage inter-generational learning. This built-in approach is an innovation unique at the Smithsonian. Additionally, we will offer a rich virtual experience for those who are unable to come to the National Mall, building on early work begun in 1999 with the development of the Latino Virtual Museum, which evolved into an avatar-based, multi-user space in Second Life's platform. In-person and online visitors will be invited to discuss and share their perspectives, actively engaging with this much-needed, vibrant gateway into the Latino experience at the Smithsonian. Visitors will leave the Molina Gallery with a greater understanding and appreciation of the many contributions our diverse communities have made in building this country and shaping its national culture.

The inaugural exhibition, *¡Presente! A Latino History of the United States*, will reveal how Latinos have shaped the nation since before its founding through today. Visitors will be invited to reexamine what they know about Latinos and U.S. history through digital immersive elements, such as interactive timelines and maps.

Exhibitions will be changed every two years, and will focus on key episodes in Latino History, such as the Mexican American War of 1846-48 and the Spanish American War of 1898. Additionally, we will organize exhibitions around such topics as Latinos and Armed Forces History.

In organizing and mounting these exhibitions the Latino Center is supported by and collaborates with Smithsonian curators, archivists, conservators, collections managers, museum educators, and design and construction staff.

While the Molina Family Latino Gallery will greatly elevate and showcase the Latino experience it will not constitute the only expression of *Latinidad* (Latino presence), at the Smithsonian. As previously noted, the Latino Center administers federal funds through the Latino Initiatives Pool, which makes possible a diverse array of research initiatives, exhibitions, collections, public and educational programs, and leadership and professional development programs in arts, history, and science units of the Smithsonian. For Fiscal Year 2019 the Pool supported 28 projects across 14 Smithsonian museums, galleries and offices. Since the inception of the Latino Initiatives Pool in 1995 we have awarded over \$27 million dollars to support numerous Latino projects.

Taino: Native Heritage and Identity in the Caribbean is a bilingual exhibition currently on view at the National Museum of the American Indian's George Gustav Heye Center in New York City. *Dolores Huerta: Revolution in the Fields/Revolución en los Campos* is currently on view at the Haggin Museum in Stockton, California, a national tour managed by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. As of this date the exhibition is booked through August 2021 at venues in Houston, Texas, Omaha, Nebraska, Greeley, Colorado, Las Cruces, New Mexico, Bakersfield, California, and Park City, Utah. We anticipate several more bookings before the end of its run.

In October 2020, the Smithsonian American Art Museum will open an important exhibition tracing the history of Chicano graphic arts, and the National Museum of American History will open another on Latinos and baseball, tracing the intimate relationship between Latino communities and athletes and America's Pastime. Importantly, a traveling version of *¡Pleibol! In the Barrios and the Big Leagues* will open simultaneously at a venue in Southern California, probably in San Bernardino. Both exhibitions will be bilingual.

In 2010 the Smithsonian established the Latino Curatorial Initiative, which enables Smithsonian museums, archives, research centers, and its traveling exhibition service to hire content expertise which, in turn, has enabled the previously mentioned dramatic increase in research, exhibitions, collections, public and educational programs, digital content, and publications. To illustrate, I'd like to highlight Dr. Margaret Salazar-Porzio, the curator responsible for the Latinos and baseball exhibition. Margaret, an ardent baseball fan was hired at the National Museum of American History in 2013, and soon after launched a multi-city collecting initiative for the baseball project. While the museum

had Roberto Clemente's jersey and a few other items, she did not have enough objects and documents to tell these important community-oriented stories. Margaret and her colleagues conducted 15 community collecting events with 35 community collaborators in 14 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. In all, Margaret and her team engaged with more than 1,000 participants and collected over 150 new acquisitions for the National Museum of American History. Suffice it to say that but for Margaret coming on board the research would not have been conducted, the collection would not have grown, and the exhibition, including the traveling version, would not have been organized. We are more than a year out from the opening of the show and the traveling version has already drawn the attention of five customer venues.

Since 2010 the Latino Curatorial Initiative has placed 12 content experts in nine Smithsonian units. In 2018, we enhanced this initiative by contracting Curatorial Assistants, emerging scholars and museum professionals—mostly Latina—to work alongside Smithsonian curators. Not only do these experts provide much needed support, they receive the kind of real-world experience that will position them for what we hope will be fulltime employment at the Smithsonian or other museum down the road. I am proud to report that in 2018 the Latino Curatorial Initiative won the American Alliance of Museum's prestigious Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion Award, and is now considered best practice in the museum world.

The success of the Latino Curatorial Initiative has prompted the Latino Center to intensify its efforts in expanding pathway programs for emerging Latina and Latino museum professionals. We actually began this effort in 1994 with the establishment of the Latino Museum Studies Program, which each summer brings a cohort of 12 graduate students for an immersive experience in museum practice. I am happy to report that 13 program alumni currently work at the Smithsonian. They are among a total of 325 alumni, several of whom are working in other museums and cultural institutions, in addition to many who have opted to stay in the academy.

The Latino Museum Studies Program is an unqualified success and we will continue it; however, we need to reach our collegiate population at an earlier stage in their academic trajectory with the hopes of steering them toward a path that is museum studies-focused. We know that most Latinas and Latinos enrolled in post-secondary education are attending community colleges, not four-year institutions. In 2018, we began a partnership with East Los Angeles College and its Vincent Price Art Museum that brought a small cohort of their students to the Smithsonian for an internship linked to a winter-term museum studies seminar. We repeated the program in 2019. The program has shown some very promising results. The 2018 students are enrolled in or have graduated from museum studies-related programs at UC Berkeley and Cal State Long Beach. This year's students will soon finish up at East LA College and transfer to a four-year institution. I am pleased to report that the College has taken the next sequential step, that of establishing a Museum Studies Certificate Program, making it one of only two such programs in the country (that I'm aware of) at the community college level. The Smithsonian internship component will remain a fixed part of this new program.

An important and intentional aspect of this pathway approach is to specifically reach undergraduate Latinas and Latinos who are interested in non-curatorial museum professions. The truth is that our community is woefully underrepresented within the ranks of conservators, exhibition designers, collection managers, museum educators, exhibition preparators, and in digital culture, technology-proficient creatives who are shaping and will continue to shape the museum field. While all the Latina and Latino curators and archivists who have come to the Smithsonian through our initiative have a doctoral degree, or are about to complete their dissertations, it is important to consider that these other professions do not require a Ph.D., thus making these career paths more inviting and accessible to a greater number of our students.

Our Curatorial Initiative, our exhibition experience, our public and educational program expertise, growing collections, the Molina Gallery, and these growing pathway programs comprise a successful model for expanding Latino presence pan-institutionally. This model has created a base of content expertise, material culture (collections), and public and educational expertise that enables us to tell the Latino story while also supporting a healthy infrastructure in which to tell it.

The Latino Center has been dedicated to on-going efforts to increase the visibility of Latino populations and their rich and culturally diverse stories at the Smithsonian. We will continue to build collections, hire curators, mount exhibitions, present public and educational programs, support music recordings, engage in scholarly research, dialog, collaborate and take the necessary steps to assure that the Latino story is presented as an integral and important part of the American story.

Thank you for supporting this ongoing work, and for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.