



## **Testimony in Support of HB 1431**

**March 2, 2020**

### **Legislative and Congressional Districts – Criteria and Open Hearing Process George Escobar CASA, Chief of Programs and Services**

Honorable Members of the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee:

My name is George Escobar, I am Chief of Programs and Services at CASA, the mid-Atlantic region's largest immigrant serving organization with over 100,000 members. On behalf of my organization and our members, I urge you to vote in favor of enactment of House Bill 1431, which would ensure our electoral districts accurately represent our communities.

This bill addresses a vital issue for our communities by ensuring their vote will not be diluted and manipulated through a gerrymandering process that historically has worked to artificially suppress and divide the political power of communities of color. The process by which electoral districts are formed are rarely transparent and almost never look to proactively engage the feedback of those communities who are often most disproportionately impacted. The irregular electoral district maps that result, often resembling shapes you would be forgiven for thinking they were inkblots from a psychological test, depress the vote and often produce elected representatives that have little in common with the communities they serve. By ensuring a much more transparent process, taking into account the physical environment, natural boundaries and identity common to the resident population, one could draw much more effective boundaries and ensure representatives are much more accountable to the people in their district.

Every year, CASA assists over 1200 Legal Permanent Residents apply for citizenship, registers them to vote, educates naturalized citizens on the electoral process while its C4 sister organization CASA in Action knocks on thousands of doors on behalf of candidates with platforms focused on equity and inclusion for all communities of color. Should this bill be enacted, these new voters will have a much greater opportunity to engage in a much more transparent and public process as the electoral districts are determined. Ensuring language, racial and ethnic factors are included in this process will not only lay the foundation for a more equitable and inclusive democracy but also stimulate greater civic engagement and participation in the electoral process overall – a goal all should be proud to espouse in our legislature. That is why CASA enthusiastically urge you to vote in favor of HB 1431.

Thank you for your time

*George Escobar*

George Escobar

Chief of Programs and Services

