

**Testimony of Congressman José E. Serrano of New York  
Committee on House Administration Members Day Hearing  
Thursday, November 21, 2019**

Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 2420, the National Museum of the American Latino Act.

The effort to establish a Latino Museum started 25 years ago when the Smithsonian Institution released *Willful Neglect*. This candid report acknowledged a lack of Latino inclusion throughout the institution and laid out a set of ten recommendations to improve it. The most significant step was the creation of the Latino Center in 1997. However, 24 years later, in September 2018, the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative released a report measuring the Smithsonian's progress and found only three of its ten recommendations from the original report had been addressed.

To further this effort, former Representatives Xavier Becerra of California and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida introduced the first bill in Congress to begin the establishment of a Latino Museum in 2003. In 2008, President George W. Bush signed legislation including their language forming a Commission to study its creation. In 2011, the Commission's final report to Congress and President Barack Obama found that a Latino Museum was necessary and feasible, and it laid out a roadmap to help get us there. It has been over eight years since its release.

H.R. 2420 will finally authorize the process to create a Latino Museum by establishing a Board of Trustees to provide recommendations to the Smithsonian Board of Regents on the design, placement, construction, and establishment of a future museum. It will include a diverse set of voices to ensure all parts of the Latino community are fully represented.

H.R. 2420 authorizes the Smithsonian to undertake a campaign to raise half of the funds necessary to pay for this ambitious endeavor from private sources, while also authorizing federal appropriations for the rest, as is historically done for other museums.

H.R. 2420 also establishes educational grant programs to help bolster the work of other Latino Museums across the country and provide scholarship opportunities for students studying in the fields of Latino history, arts, and culture to help train a pipeline of talent to keep this history alive well into the future.

Passage of H.R. 2420 will show that representation and inclusion matter. Latinos currently make up almost one-fifth of the U.S. population. We are the largest and second-fastest growing ethnic group. We have served in every American war and have made significant contributions in the world of sports, music, the arts, sciences, and beyond. From the American Revolution to the fight for civil rights, Latinos have been on the frontlines of history. These stories and heroes are often overlooked, but to deny their telling is to deny a very important part of what made this country what it is today. They deserve a dedicated space of their own on to tell the full story of America.

H.R. 2420 is one of my highest priorities during my final term in Congress. With 245 bipartisan cosponsors and counting, I urge the Committee on House Administration to help make this dream a reality for so many of us in the Latino community. Thank you.