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April 6, 2010

RE: Letter of Recommendation for María Blanco, unique I.D. no. 08543

Dear Applicant Review Panel Members:

I am the Director of Litigation at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), the largest provider of direct legal services and advocacy on behalf of the Asian Pacific American community in the country. I am thrilled to write this letter of recommendation for María Blanco to serve on California's first Citizens Redistricting Commission. The qualifications desired of the Commissioners could not better describe María Blanco.

I have known María for over a decade. We met when we co-counseled a case together beginning in 1998 on behalf of Latino, African American and Filipino high school students who had been denied admission to the University of California at Berkeley despite their stellar academic records and personal profiles. I have also watched Maria's impressive career since the time when she was Regional Counsel of the San Francisco office of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) to her current position as Executive Director of the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity & Diversity at Berkeley Law School.

Because María is so strong in all three of the areas highlighted in the Voters FIRST Act, I discuss each of them in turn.

**Analytical skills.** I got to see first-hand María's unparalleled analytical skills. The case we worked on together involved complex statistical analysis from raw data. We combed through voluminous information on the admission rates of students over a multi-year span broken down by race and ethnicity and correlated to various criteria. María relished the opportunity to do this and made it her mission to understand the data backwards and forwards. We also worked with experts who conducted regression analyses on the effect of various admissions criteria and again, María's skills were top-notch. In addition to the data and numbers analyses, the case presented tough questions of law, including the balance of privacy interests and the need for disclosure, and required creative, accurate legal analysis at every turn. For example, one of the U.S. Supreme Court decisions that came down while our case was pending all but eliminated one of our claims, and María played a leadership role in ensuring that we understood its impact and developed a strategy to chart the right course. I have no doubt María will excel in the Commission's charge to completely understand and apply the legal concepts that affect redistricting. Admissions policies are themselves complex and María showed a knack for and tireless energy about sitting down with admissions officers in informal discovery sessions or in formal depositions and getting to the bottom of what was happening. She formulates concise questions, listens actively, and works patiently and diligently to elicit key information while also being able to separate the important details from the unimportant ones. In litigation, it is absolutely critical when speaking with witnesses and experts to distinguish fact from opinion and

to assess the credibility of the speaker. Finally, the case we worked on involved multiple teams of people working together, from the legal team to plaintiffs themselves (who were primarily recently graduated high school students) to defense counsel. In mediations, interactions with the judge as well as broader media efforts to educate the public about the importance of equal access to higher education, María helped a group of opinionated and strong-willed individuals to reach consensus and to apply ourselves to the tasks at hand. She has a gift for making everyone a team player because she herself is so naturally one, even while she is playing a leadership role. Her manner is inclusive and respectful and this makes her the person you want on the team to avoid logjams and counterproductive interactions. She is someone people listen to but she also makes sure everyone else feels heard.

**Ability to be impartial.** Though a litigator by training, María is nothing like the stereotypical litigator who always believes she is right and is unwilling to listen to those with different opinions. María is the opposite. In all of my interactions with her, María is the voice of the person asking the rest of us to consider a case, an argument, an issue from all sides. Indeed, in her current role as Executive Director, her ability to put aside her own personal political beliefs, to choose research projects and analyze research results and arrive at sound policy prescriptions, has been critical to her success. I have no doubt that as a Commissioner, María will take her role and her responsibilities seriously and work for fair, inclusive outcomes without any improper influence.

**Appreciation for California's diversity.** In this, as with the other two key qualifications, María's skill, expertise and long commitment to doing work to better all of California speaks for itself. In the case during which I first got to know María, she worked at MALDEF but her interest in the case was to ensure equal educational access for all excluded communities. Working with María is such a pleasure precisely because she pays more than lip service to the notion of diversity; she embraces it and understands it and is willing to dig deep into the many complex layers of what it means--not just in terms of race but also geographic diversity, gender and class. When my organization needs to reach out to someone who appreciates the full diversity that California embodies and who has knowledge and interest and ability to identify barriers to exclusion for different groups, we as an Asian American organization often turn to María. María is intimately familiar with the challenges of competing interests and has worked her entire career to bridge them, to find common ground, and to develop fair policies and results where the rights of one group do not come at the expense of others.

As you work to create the first ever Citizens Redistricting Commission in California, I firmly believe that you will not find a more qualified candidate to help define the best promise of this Commission than María Blanco.

I would be happy to speak with you about any questions or concerns. I can be reached at

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Very truly yours,



Julie A. Su