STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN JOSÉ E. SERRANO

Before the Senate Judiciary Committee

As Prepared for Delivery

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Sessions, Members of the Committee, thank you for the honor you have given me by inviting me to testify on behalf of Judge Sonia Sotomayor.

I am Congressman José E. Serrano, and today I represent the proudest neighborhood in the nation, the Bronx.

I cannot begin to describe the pride and excitement that my community feels to know that one of our own stands on the verge of a historic confirmation to the United States Supreme Court. Like all elected officials, I am often greeted by constituents on streets, at diners, after church services, where I cut my hair, or at the local bodega. In the past these conversations were about a personal issue, a congressional issue or simply a friendly greeting. Since Judge Sotomayor's nomination the conversations are about Sonia. They speak about her as if she was a member of their personal family. They speak about their pride in her accomplishments. Their comments, to me, show a profound understanding of just how significant this nomination is and how it proves that in our country everything is possible.

One of the best examples of the significance of this nomination is the number of people that have come together, this week, to watch these hearings. Schools in the Bronx and in many communities around our nation are using it as a teaching tool to encourage students not to give up regardless of where they live or the economic hardships that their families may be facing. Watching parties have been organized in many communities. People are coming together, as a community, to watch these hearings. That is a clear sign of the pride and joy that they feel. Back home it is a celebration.

Like the distinguished nominee, my family left Puerto Rico because of economic conditions. Like her, we grew up in a public housing project in the Bronx. Like her family, we also struggled in our new surroundings. We were still poor in the Bronx, but we had dignity and our eye on a better future. One of the proudest moments of my life came when I was first elected to the New York State Assembly with my State Assembly classmate Senator Chuck Schumer. As they were swearing us in a friend said to my father, "Don Pepe, you are a lucky man. You have two children. One son is a school teacher and the other is an Assemblyman. My Pop, with that wonderful,

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charming accented English replied: "I busted my back to get lucky." I am sure that Judge Sotomayor and her mother have had many similar moments. We are living our parents' dreams—enabled by their sacrifices and years of hard work.

Our story is not unique to the community we come from. All around our great nation, there are people working day and night, two jobs, saving, doing without, all in order that their children could live the life that they want for them.

Sonia Sotomayor represents the best of American culture. She comes directly from the strand of our national character that says "you can be anything you want." It says, "Through hard work you can reach the top in this country." She is living proof that our dreams for our children are never impossible.

In accepting the honor of your invitation I wondered if my role here today was to tell you about her legal qualifications. Coming before you are many people who will speak to her work in the legal profession. We know that she is highly regarded and that she has a deep understanding of the law and a profound respect for the Constitution. I am also aware of the fact that she comes before you with more Federal Court experience than any other nominee in the last hundred years. I quickly came to the conclusion that my role is to tell you about where she comes from, how she got to this point, and what that means.

We come from rough neighborhoods. We were surrounded by people making do on too little. Sometimes, there was desperation and despair. Around us were many distractions and false choices that could have taken us down a totally different road. But there was also ambition and people determined to make something of themselves.

We came from a place where family comes first, where the core values were hard work and looking out for one another. As I moved out into the wider world, first through the Army, and then in my political career, I came to learn that these were not liberal or New York or Latino values. They were American values. Bronx neighborhoods may not be seen as similar to "middle America" but I can assure you that the values that we hold dear—family, freedom, looking out for family and neighbors—are the same. Everyone watching this nomination should know that based upon her background and ideals, they are in good hands with Judge Sotomayor.

I can't help but adding here that you can also be sure you are in the presence of a true blue American when you know that Judge Sotomayor is a proud Yankees fan.

When I walk into the Capitol to work on behalf of the American people, I often stop and think 'how fortunate I am as a kid from the Bronx projects to make it here.' It is an incredible story that I have lived. But since Judge Sotomayor was nominated by President Obama, I have had to remember that my story pales in comparison to hers.

This proud woman from the Bronx is perhaps the best and the brightest we have and she has risen to the top on the basis of her incredible intellect and hard, hard work. I know that her values are your values and those of people around our great nation. Her story is my story. Her story is your story or that of your parents or your grandparents.

She will be a brilliant Justice on the Supreme Court and I urge you to vote in favor of Judge Sotomayor's nomination.

Thank you for allowing me the honor of testifying before this committee on such a historic occasion.