



CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

Illinois Senate Subcommittee on Redistricting for Kankakee and Will County

To: Chair Joyce and committee members

From: Syamala Krishnamsetty (she,her,hers), Advocacy Director of CHANGE Illinois

Thank you Chair Joyce and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony about the remapping process for Illinois state and congressional districts. My name is Syamala Krishnamsetty and I am the Advocacy Director for CHANGE Illinois and the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund. Both are nonpartisan nonprofits that educate, engage and advocate for ethics and efficiency in governments and elections. CHANGE Illinois is a coalition and alongside our diverse partners in more than 30 organizations, we long have advocated for an independent and transparent redistricting process that results in equitable maps.

In the last two weeks, we testified before the full committee and the redistricting subcommittees about the need for a transparent and accountable map-making process. We asked simple questions, seeking answers that would help the public understand how to engage in this year's remapping process.

For the public to participate in shaping their districts in any meaningful way, important questions need to be answered. We remain deeply concerned about how these proceedings have been conducted thus far. We scrambled, on very short notice, to reach community members in Kankakee and Will counties so they were aware that this hearing is taking place. We were not aware of what area this committee oversaw until we learned a few days ago that the Senate had put together a map with the regions outlined. Over the past few days, changes were and continue to be made to the Senate website's list of hearing dates and times. Only a handful of people testified in last week's hearings. It is clear that not enough is being done by lawmakers and staff to ensure awareness, transparency and a meaningful opportunity for people in various regions to engage.

If this continues, lawmakers will fail to meet the goals of an inclusive process that allows people in communities to guide it.

If this process is truly meant to be inclusive, then what steps were taken to ensure that the public was made aware? What additional steps were taken to make sure that historically disenfranchised communities were made aware of today's hearing to advocate for their representation? What steps were taken to ensure language access is not an impediment to the public's ability to participate? We certainly know there are many Spanish speaking residents of Kankakee County and Will County and we're concerned they cannot interact with this committee and engage in this process. Posting notice on government websites is clearly not enough to reach historically marginalized communities.

There were a number of community and good government organizations whose representatives testified the last two weeks and all of us, independently, said these committee meetings need more transparency. Should we now be telling people they should use ACS data to draw maps?

Illinoisans need and deserve a transparent and independent process. A survey conducted by CHANGE Illinois last year found that 75 percent of Illinois voters support independent redistricting. A proposal we have introduced with Sen. Melinda Bush, SB2554, would help meet these demands.

In order to meet these challenges, our proposal, SB2554, is a plan that would ensure more equitable and transparent maps than those of the past. We ask that the committee implement these necessary reforms immediately:

- Hold a minimum of 35 well publicized hearings that not only give people a chance to testify, but ensure lawmakers respond to feedback and consider testimony in map proposals.
- Implement fairness standards that prioritize compliance with the Federal Voting Rights Act and the Illinois Voting Rights Act to make certain that communities of color have the opportunity to elect their preferred candidates.
- Require mappers to respect communities of interest and geographic boundaries that already exist.
- The web address that has been established to inform the public of the remapping process must be advertised extensively. The website should include testimony, map submissions by the public, proposals being drafted by the committee, and all other documents and communications relevant to its work. A compliance report must be issued with any map proposal describing how the plan meets requirements in the federal and state voting rights acts. The report must respond to testimony and maps submitted by the public.
- Establish a period between the introduction of the proposed maps and votes by the chambers to ensure that additional public hearings are held and the public has time to understand and respond to proposed maps *before votes*.
- Fix the implementation date of the recently enacted No Representation Without Population Act, a law that will end prison gerrymandering. The newly enacted law still deprives representation for those who are incarcerated for another decade.

Will this subcommittee follow the same process as the other subcommittees? Or will each committee be free to conduct itself differently without any consistent rules? The answers to these questions remain unclear. This makes it even more difficult for community members to participate in the redrawing of their districts in a meaningful way.

It is imperative that more information be provided about how these hearings will be conducted, what data will be used, what will be discussed, and that more notice is given to the public about how to participate. Consider making the invitation list public and advertise these meetings in the media.

As lawmakers, you have a duty to make all of this abundantly clear to the public so they can participate in defining their communities in Illinois' remapping process.

Again, last week, we heard that ACS data will be used for the remap process. Should we be telling communities to draw communities-of-interest maps with ACS data?

We remain concerned that ACS data does not include everyone, a legal requirement.

We recommend consistent rules and guidelines be established to ensure members of the public have ample time to prepare to participate in a process that is transparent and accountable.

Illinois' districts belong to the people and they expect an independent and transparent process that values the principle of one person, one vote. We again urge you to meet their clear expectations.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to try to answer any questions that committee members might have.

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