



CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

Illinois Senate Committee on Redistricting--Chicago North

To: Chair Feigenholtz and committee members

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

Thank you Chair Feigenholtz and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Syamala Krishnamsetty and I am the advocacy director at 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, transparent redistricting process.

There's now been two weeks of Senate hearings covering almost half of the counties in Illinois. Despite that, participation by the general public at these hearings has not been enough to ensure maps will accurately reflect Illinois' many diverse communities. There are a number of community and good government organizations whose representatives have testified and all of us, independently, have said the Senate and House committee meetings need more transparency.

We appreciate the effort by the Senate to post their upcoming hearings with more notice, but we continue to have concerns about the lack of transparency and detail about the subject matter, about how people should know who should show up to which committee hearings based on vague geographic areas, and about how testimony will be reflected in map proposals. There has been no indication of what the process looks like after April 16th when the last Senate committee hearing is scheduled to take place.

A fair map doesn't result from simply holding hearings. There must be much more robust outreach to communities across the state to give people ample time to plan to attend. In the past few years, the state spent millions of dollars to ensure widespread participation in the 2020 Census. Currently, the state isn't doing a fraction of that to ensure people are aware of opportunities to participate in redistricting hearings that set how they are represented for the next 10 years. Posting notice on government websites clearly is insufficient.

Good government groups and community organizations are doing their part to notify residents, but it's challenging when we cannot answer their basic questions. The people of Illinois need more outreach. They need this committee to respond to their input and explain how it will be used in map proposals. People absolutely need to see map proposals weeks before votes are taken and they need to have the opportunity to weigh-in at additional public hearings after maps are made public and before votes are cast.

To date, we've seen a great deal of focus on what data will be used to produce maps. Since it appears the majority party is intent on pushing forward with map-drawing, community members are left with no choice but to use ACS sampling data for their testimony. ACS data was not intended to be used for drawing legislative maps.



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Lawmakers have presented options that are confounding and will not guarantee a fair process, nor equitable maps. The options are to either risk our democracy to the whim of a random draw, or allow for maps to be pushed through by the majority using ACS data that, again, was never intended to be used for map drawing.

There are other options that could be pursued. As the representatives from the National Conference of State Legislatures repeatedly have said in their testimony, the Illinois General Assembly could appeal to courts to grant a delay in constitutional deadlines to wait for census data.

Elected officials could pass a law to push back our Primary Election Day and the petition filing period to ensure map drawers have enough time to create maps before election filing deadlines. Such court relief has been pursued in other states, like Oregon and California.

This week, the Chicago Tribune editorial board reported that sources told them the Senate already has “its tentative map drawn,” raising additional questions about whether public input will be used. If they already are drawn, how can anyone be assured public input will be reflected in these maps that will form the foundation of our democracy for the next 10 years? If maps already exist, are they going to be made available now so the public can weigh in on the map proposals at upcoming hearings? If map proposals are being devised and not made public, then that raises the question of what purpose these public hearings actually serve.

We need more accountability.

We need to ensure the maps produced prioritize Federal and state voting rights acts and protect communities of interest.

The people of Illinois need and want lawmakers to make it clear, in state law, that districts will be created without prioritizing incumbents or candidates from one party, whether that is for their benefit or harm.

When California created districts that way in 2011, the maps produced resulted in an increase in the number of majority members and in nine more elected people of color.

A compliance report is needed, explaining how maps meet these shared values, along with the value of prioritizing communities of color and those for whom English is not their primary language. Non English speakers continue to face impediments to participating in this process. It is imperative that more information be provided about how these hearings will be conducted and how these maps will be drawn.

We ask this committee and the Senate to meet the challenges ahead so Illinoisans get a map that puts power in their hands.

Illinois' districts belong to the people. They expect an independent and transparent process that values and responds to their input. They expect maps to be created that aren't based on politics, but on the needs of their communities. We urge you to meet their clear expectations.

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