

**Testimony of Jay Young,
Executive Director, Common Cause Illinois
Before the Senate Committee on Redistricting
March 25, 2021**

Good afternoon, Chair Peters, Vice-Chairs Villanueva and Collins, and honorable members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to once again discuss the drawing of districts in our state. My name is Jay Young, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause Illinois. Over the last three years, my organization dedicated itself to the build-up towards Census 2020 in our state, from our advocacy around appropriations to chairing the statewide policy table to advising Secretary Hou's Census Office. Once that outreach effort wrapped up, we immediately turned our attention to redistricting. Indeed, Common Cause has been actively involved in redistricting on multiple levels throughout the country – including educating people on what the redistricting process is, how communities can participate in the process, and the need for transparency and inclusiveness. We advocate for those things where they are possible and we sue where they are not.

Illinois has so much to be proud of, in terms of how we responded to an extremely difficult census. We didn't end up as the nation's seventh-best state in terms of its self-response rate or our #1 ranking among states with over nine million people by accident. Thanks to the leadership of this body, we responded to a global pandemic, a shameful partisan effort to hijack the process through a citizenship question, and the pain that spilled out into the streets following George Floyd's murder. We did it by building an army of "trusted messengers" that flooded our communities with census ambassadors. I can't tell you the number of times that I sat with our Census Office's co-directors, Marishonta Wilkerson and Oswaldo Alvarez, and listened to them gush about the innovation of subgrantees all across



this City, from stickers on fresh tortilla wrappers to caravans to All-Star game watch parties. It kills me that we're just going to throw all of that away.

Look, there is no question that this is a redistricting year like no other. When Common Cause first learned about the adjusted timeframe for the Census Bureau to release data used for redistricting, we celebrated that fact. I've spoken to enough Census Bureau employees to know that they needed that extra time to not only adjust for the extended enumeration period that we fought for but also to take extra time to get the data correct. ***It is therefore our strong recommendation that the General Assembly not produce any congressional and state district lines before the U.S. Census Bureau releases the redistricting files to the states.***

Of course, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't do anything right now. As others can attest, the Chicago South region was one of the primary reasons that, several years ago, that groups like mine, like ICIRR, like Asian Americans Advancing Justice fought for that first \$1.5 million that was allocated to the Secretary of State's office, and it's why we came back later pushing for much more. While we could never have predicted what Trump would do or the obstacles that COVID would create, we were right to focus on this region. While the City had a 55.5% self-response rate before the Census's Non-Response Follow Up period, there are tracts in, say, Back of the Yards or Englewood where the response rate was only about 27%. If it was hard to get folks to fill out a 10 question survey, think how hard it'll be to get them to draw maps for their community in the time frame that's available to them - especially if it's without support from those that they trust. Or any information about the tool that you are going to use.

In the months between now and August, when we hope to get usable redistricting data, reach out to Rainbow Push's Census Coalition. Leverage the networks that you built in this region through ICIRR, HSI, and the other RIs, and put them to work helping community members draw their own communities of interest. Hold well-publicized hearings with notice in media that people actually read. In a language that they can understand.



Use the data at your disposal to draw exemplar maps that communities in this region can react to. I will admit that I don't know what data set you plan to use. To my knowledge, it hasn't been disclosed. For the sake of your constituents though, I hope that your data gets down to the block level. That it doesn't rely on the sampling methods that you see in something like the 1-year ACS data set, as we have concerns about the extent to which that data will satisfy the guarantee of equal populations across electoral districts and the dictates of the Voting Rights Act.

Finally, depending on timing, the General Assembly must consider moving the March 2022 primary date as well as the November 2021 petition dates to allow time for maps based on the actual census data to be drafted and vetted. We don't make this recommendation lightly, and I would urge this body to use the intervening months to undertake a race-equity analysis to determine the implications of moving the dates.

Obviously, the recommendations and adjusted timelines that I have offered here today would likely necessitate the involvement of the courts. We stand ready to work with the General Assembly to adjust the timelines to accommodate the Census Bureau's work, as we did, for example, last summer in California and are currently exploring in Oregon.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering any questions that you might have.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Jay Young, Executive Director
Common Cause Illinois
205 West Randolph Avenue, Suite 1220
Chicago, Illinois 60606
312.372.2422



jyoung@commoncause.org

