

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD DEMAREST YANT
ON BEHALF OF
THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB OF CHICAGO

Thank you for allowing me to testify today before the Senate Redistricting Committee - Northwest Cook County Subcommittee.

First, let me note that it was a bit difficult for me to determine that my testimony is appropriate for this subcommittee. I live in a North Shore Cook County suburb. I work in the River North neighborhood of Chicago (when I am not working from home). I am speaking on behalf of the Union League Club of Chicago, whose clubhouse is located at Jackson and Federal in Chicago. I do not consider any of these to be in Northwest Cook County. But I found a rather vague map that suggests that one or more of my locations are within the area considered Northwest Cook County for this subcommittee. I noticed that my state senator is on the subcommittee, so I guess I am in the right place.

As indicated, I am speaking on behalf of the Union League Club of Chicago. Our organization does not generally endorse partisan candidates. But our founders supported President Lincoln in his efforts to preserve the Union and supported U.S. Grant for president at the time of the Chicago Club's founding in 1879. The Club's mission is rooted in sound public policy.

Among the primary objects of the Union League Club of Chicago are:

- to inculcate a higher appreciation of the value and sacred obligations of American citizenship,
- to aid in the enforcement of all laws enacted to preserve the purity of the ballot box,
- to resist and oppose corruption, and
- to secure honesty and efficiency in the administration of National, State and Municipal affairs.

The Club has taken positions on matters of public policy. Its bylaws require that, before taking any such position, the matter must be considered by its Public Affairs Committee, of which I am a past Chair. Following consideration by that committee, the position will only be endorsed by the Club if it is adopted by the Board of the Club.

It was to further the primary objects of the Club that, in 2015, the Union League Club supported **“adoption of the amendment to establish a non-partisan, independent commission to draw maps for Illinois legislative districts in a fair and transparent manner.”**

In 2017, the Club adopted the Resolution that I have attached to this testimony. I would like to quote two of the paragraphs of that resolution here:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Union League Club of Chicago supports changes to the Illinois Constitution and the statutes of the State of Illinois that will promote fair and independent mapping of Illinois legislative and other political districts within the State and its counties and municipalities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Union League Club of Chicago supports the Draft Redistricting Principles developed by the Illinois Redistricting Collaborative Principles Working Group that are attached to this resolution.

The referenced Redistricting Principles include:

- comply with the U.S. Constitution,
- comply with federal and state voting rights acts,
- establish a non-partisan redistricting process,
- maximize voter choice, encourage electoral candidacy and enhance electoral competitiveness,
- recognize and preserve communities of interest,
- accurately represent the permanent residency of Illinoisans,
- provide a transparent and accountable process, and
- provide for open, full and meaningful public participation.

Thank you once again for your attention and consideration.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, among the primary objects of the Union League Club of Chicago

("ULCC") are:

- to inculcate a higher appreciation of the value and sacred obligations of American citizenship,
- to aid in the enforcement of all laws enacted to preserve the purity of the ballot box,
- to resist and oppose corruption, and
- to secure honesty and efficiency in the administration of National, State and Municipal affairs; and

WHEREAS, representative democracy works best when the public actively engages with policy discussions and elections; and

WHEREAS, Illinois currently determines its state legislative districts through a process that protects incumbents and frequently results in "gerrymandered" districts; and

WHEREAS, said gerrymandering results in uncontested or non-competitive elections, has the effect of disenfranchising many voters, and discourages many people from exercising their franchise; and

WHEREAS, the ULCC has in the past sought alternatives to the current system of determining legislative districts within the State, including by the resolution of the Board of ULCC on November 15, 2015, by which it:

"endorse(d) efforts to include the proposed 'Independent Map Amendment' on ballots statewide in the November, 2016 General Election to allow the citizens of Illinois to vote on this initiative; and . . . support(ed) adoption of the amendment to establish a non-partisan, independent commission to draw maps for Illinois legislative districts in a fair and transparent manner"; and

WHEREAS, the Independent Map Amendment was not on the ballot in November 2016; and

WHEREAS, the ULCC, together with many of the other civic organizations from around the State of Illinois that supported the proposed Independent Map Amendment, has continued to discuss ways to provide for the drawing of district maps in a fair and transparent manner; and

WHEREAS, correcting the means of determining district boundaries is especially urgent as the 2020 decennial census approaches;

NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Union League Club of Chicago supports changes to the Illinois Constitution and the statutes of the State of Illinois that will promote fair and independent mapping of Illinois legislative and other political districts within the State and its counties and municipalities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Union League Club of Chicago supports the Draft Redistricting Principles developed by the Illinois Redistricting Collaborative Principles Working Group that are attached to this resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Union League Club of Chicago Public Affairs Committee and its Executive Director of Public Affairs are authorized to publicly advocate this position and to inform the Governor of the State of Illinois, Legislature of the State of Illinois and the general public of these positions of the Union League Club of Chicago.

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Representative democracy works best when the public actively engages with policy discussions and elections. Even a cursory look at Illinois' current process shows a system that favors incumbents and is dominated by partisan, rather than public objectives. Redistricting reform will offer diverse voices and independent thinkers an opportunity to serve. Breaking partisan gridlock and restoring functional state government is essential for Illinois' future and is an especially urgent call to action as we near the 2020 Census.

Redistricting plans must be drawn in a manner that allows Illinois residents, including communities of color, to elect candidates of their choice who represent and are held accountable to, the interests of that community. Fundamentally improving Illinois' redistricting process will strengthen our communities, foster a more robust democracy and restore public confidence in government.

Any meaningful redistricting plan must provide transparency and allow true public participation. However, we recognize that principles of voter choice, geographic cohesiveness and competitiveness can at times come into conflict with one another.

The eight criteria below are presented in priority order to help guide considerations in Illinois' mapmaking:

1. COMPLY WITH THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

The process must be in accordance with the requirements of the U.S. Constitution. All persons – regardless of age, citizenship, immigration status, ability or eligibility to vote – should be accurately counted through the Census. In accordance with the U.S. Constitution, districts should be populated equally, as nearly as is practicable.

2. COMPLY WITH FEDERAL AND STATE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The process must emphasize representation and be fully compliant with both the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) and all state voting rights laws, including the Illinois Voting Rights Act. The letter and the spirit of the VRA should be reflected in redistricting to protect the rights of voters of color. To advance these foundational goals, redistricting decision-makers should exercise their latitude under the law to create majority-minority, coalition, and influence districts.

3. COMPRISE AND UPHOLD A NON-PARTISANSHIP PROCESS

The process should be independent of partisan political considerations. Mapmaking must include provisions and resources ensuring independence from political parties and legislative leaders. The process must include diverse decision-makers who reflect a broad range of viewpoints and who prioritize people and communities. Mapping consultants and software contracts, paid for with public resources, should be awarded on merit rather than partisan affiliation.

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4. MAXIMIZE VOTER CHOICE, ELECTORAL CANDIDACY AND COMPETITIVENESS

The process should result in maximizing voter choice, encouraging electoral candidacy and enhancing electoral competitiveness.

5. RECOGNIZE AND PRESERVE COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

The process should give consideration to true communities of interest. To the extent possible, but secondary to the protection of voting rights, populations with common social, ethnic or economic interests and/or shared political and geographic boundaries should have unified representation.

6. ACCURATELY INCLUDE PERMANENT RESIDENCE OF ALL ILLINOISANS

The process must accurately represent the permanent residence of all Illinoisans. All persons residing away from their permanent residence, such as students, incarcerated individuals, and missionaries, should be counted at their home address regardless of Census counting rules. The Census should be encouraged to expand its exceptions to the usual residence rule to include incarcerated individuals, as well as students, missionaries, and overseas Americans.

7. COMPRISE AND UPHOLD A TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE PROCESS

The process must be transparent and accountable. Meetings of decision-makers, and their legal, political and mapping consultants, must be open and accessible to the public to the greatest extent possible. The criteria used to draw maps must be objective, clear and justifiable and districts must be drawn to offer voter choice. Communications related to the redistricting process should be subject to the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Clear conflict-of-interest rules must be adopted and applied.

8. PROVIDE FOR OPEN, FULL, AND MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The process must allow for meaningful public participation and have the confidence of the public. Opportunities for public education and engagement must be provided, including opportunities to offer comment and amend draft maps. Redistricting bodies must provide data, tools and ways for the public to have direct input into and impact on the specific plans under consideration.