

Public Testimony to the Illinois House Redistricting Committee

**Zina Simmons, North Lawndale Community Resident
May 1, 2021**

Good morning. My name is Zina Simmons. I would like to thank you for the opportunity and privilege to stand before you and present testimony on the Redistricting process. A plan outlined by the Illinois Constitution scheduled to be completed by June 30, 2021. Failure to comply with the stated deadline will result in a more partisan and inequitable process negatively affecting African American communities. Communities of interest should be maintained and North Lawndale, located in the 9th Legislative district is my community of interest and its boundaries should protect the voting rights of African Americans and ensure that we continue being represented by the African American members of the Illinois Delegation. The Census statistics used to direct the map drawing process has continued to ignore prison gerrymandering and its negative impact on Congressional Districts headed by African Americans. A process designed to be transparent, fair and equitable could not be further from the truth.

The Illinois Constitution clearly outlines the redistricting process and its timeline. Failure to comply with this date would require the creation of a Redistricting Commission. Currently we vote for you and you represent us; however, a Redistricting Commission would represent you and not the public. The Illinois Constitution does not say what data set to use when redistricting. Simply not having completed Census data is not a reason to extend the timeline. We have completed Census data from 2010, expert inferences and predictions. The Voting Rights Act: 2011 makes it clear that if there is a violation of the Act, the plan shall be redrawn to the extent necessary, Complete the process by June 30, 2011. I live in a community of interest and any violation will require a redraw to the extent necessary.

I currently reside in the North Lawndale community. The community is adjacent to the Medical District and close to the University of Illinois at Chicago. The location is ideal for easy and efficient travel North, South, East, or West of the city. The community has been home to some great people such as Dina Washington, Ramsey Lewis, Koko Taylor, Mark Aguire and Mickey Johnson. Dr. Martin Luther King even lived in the area for a few days. It is known for its historic Greystone houses and is truly a community of interest.

It is a community located 3 miles west of the Chicago Downtown. It is located in the 24th Ward, Representative District 9, and Senate District 5. The community is composed of 87% African American, 5.27% Hispanic, 8.83% White, and 17% Asian. The community residents suffer from high rates of poverty, unemployment, crime, poor performing schools, unaffordable housing and limited access to affordable health care. Carol Marin, of CBS Local, conducted a study in 2013 on IDOC data and found that IDOC released over 30,000 prisoners. Over 12,000 came to Chicago. Five thousand, five hundred thirty-five (5,535), or 46% returned to zip codes with all or some land mass in Senate District 5.

Public Testimony to the Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Presented by Zina Simmons, 05/012021

Incarcerated individuals are not counted in the Census numbers of the communities which they originate from or return to after leaving confinement. Over the next ten years, 1.3 billion dollars that could have gone to prisoners' home community will instead be diverted to prison towns. Of that amount 24 million a year will be diverted from Senate District 5. This translates into a loss of over 240 million dollars between now and the next Census. My home district, Senate District 5 will be impacted more than any District in the state. Again, the laws you our elected officials create has contributed to the blight of this community. Legislators from Downstate communities where prisons are located have no interest in prisoners being rehabilitated or educated. As a matter of fact, they vote against rehabilitating prisoners. Yet you expect Senate District 5 including Legislative district 9 to maintain it integrity in spite losing the Census dollars needed to provide housing, and rehabilitation for returning prisoners. The monies generated from Census counting is left Downstate to enhance its communities and the inequity in Senate District 5 continues. This is prison gerrymandering, and it should be discontinued immediately.

While the cloud of gloom overshadows this community, I maintain my residency because of flashbacks from the past. Some may say that the community is economically depressed because of already mentioned reasons; however, I say the community has been robbed of its resources. Prison Gerrymandering has aided the decay of this community and there should be a law against this. Amend the law and count prisoners in homes they leave and return to after incarceration.