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April 21, 2021

Illinois House Redistricting Committee  
Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee

**Re: Illinois Redistricting**

Dear Committee Members:

I am the President and CEO at Mujeres Latinas en Acción (Mujeres). I would like this document to serve as written testimony regarding Illinois Redistricting.

Mujeres Latinas en Acción's mission is to empower Latinas through providing services, which reflect their values and culture and by being an advocate on the issues that make a difference in their lives. At almost 48 years old, Mujeres is the longest-standing Latina-led organization in the country. Our long-term goal is to support Latinas to live lives free of violence, and ensure they have access to the resources and skills they need to enrich their lives and become leaders for their families and communities. Mujeres accomplishes this goal through five concurrent strategies: crisis intervention, parenting support, economic empowerment, leadership development and advocacy.

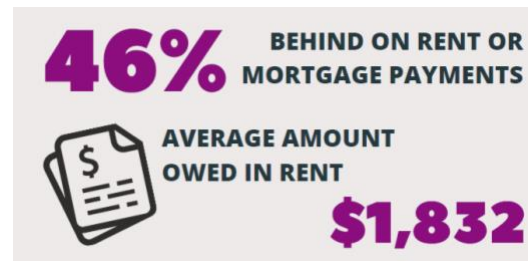
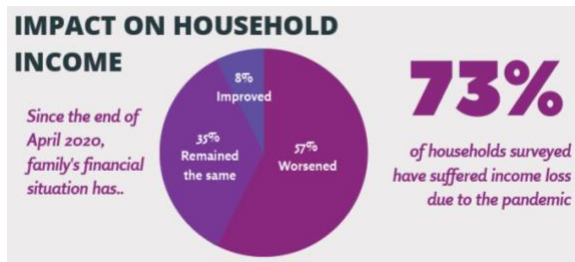
Mujeres operates three offices: its headquarters is based in Pilsen where the organization was founded, its second Chicago office is in Brighton Park located in Esperanza Health Centers and its third office and second largest, is its North Riverside office in Western Suburban Cook County. The Brighton Park office opened in June 2019 in response to our participant demographic data that illustrated that more and more of our participants were not from Pilsen and Little Village, historically Mexican neighborhoods, but Brighton Park, Gage Park, Back of the Yards, Archer Heights, Chicago Lawn and Marquette Park in Chicago's Southwest side.

Mujeres is a pioneer community-based organization, in that we responded quickly to the tremendous Latino population boom in the Cook County suburbs. In 2006, Mujeres opened up its suburban office in Cicero alongside our partner Alivio Medical Center with two Domestic Violence program employees. From that small office, we expanded our office footprint to a larger Cicero office to accommodate more groups and other programmatic services. Then several years later, we moved to a larger office building in North Riverside – farther west from Chicago and strategically located with good public transportation. Since the move to North Riverside, we have intentionally increased our programmatic services to include Sexual Assault, Empresarias del Futuro (entrepreneurship education), Parent Support counseling, Latina Leadership, and Community Engagement and Mobilization to provide immigration, gender-

based violence and health outreach. In fact, by summer 2019, we expanded our North Riverside office footprint by a third to accommodate the growth of our services.

This past year Mujeres participated in its fourth Census campaign and strategically targeted Western Suburban Cook County as part of our mobilization efforts. The Latino population growth has been so significant that Mujeres understood that we must actively involve local leaders in the community to get an accurate Census count and ensure that our families would receive the services and proper representation they deserve. Despite the numerous challenges due to the pandemic, our staff and leaders worked tirelessly to communicate to families and provide them information about the 2020 Census.

During the last thirteen months of the pandemic, Mujeres' presence particularly in Western Suburban Cook County has allowed us to attend to the needs and challenges of Latino families. We are acutely aware of the devastating economic impact of the pandemic on our communities. Through the course of the pandemic, we conducted a series of needs assessments to identify the depth of economic support needed.



Our staff was able to respond to the numerous requests for emergency cash assistance and service referrals in these suburbs. Further, our staff distributed over \$500,000 in cash assistance or debit cards to over 500 families, many who are undocumented, through our partnerships with various foundation partners, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and others. The majority of our suburban population reside in the following suburbs: Cicero, Berwyn, Stickney, and Summit. Currently, Cicero is the community area with the highest number of participants from Mujeres.



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Our Recommendation:

Mujeres urges the Committee to implement an independent and transparent process by which a fair map is drawn by maintaining the needs of communities as its principal focus. Holding hearings alone will not guarantee the creation of a fair map without intentional community outreach efforts to encourage greater attendance and participation, similar to the 2020 Census outreach by the state. We request at least a few weeks between releasing a map and holding a hearing for final community feedback that also allows communities to accommodate non-English speakers as well. This is especially important as we expect that the 2020 Census will show a dramatic increase of Latinos in Illinois that rightly deserve to be fairly represented in government. Further, fair maps for Illinois must reflect the growing Latino voting age population to make sure that Illinois continues to have proper representation of communities that require state services.

Mujeres requests that the redistricting process includes the voices of our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony on behalf of Latinas and their families in the Chicago metro area.

Sincerely,

Linda X. Tortolero  
President and CEO