



CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee

To: Chair Omar Aquino and committee members

From: Madeleine Doubek, Executive Director of CHANGE Illinois

Thank you Chair Aquino and Senate Redistricting Committee members for providing me with the opportunity to testify about the remapping process for Illinois state and congressional districts. My name is Madeleine Doubek and I am the Executive Director of CHANGE Illinois and the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund. Both are nonpartisan nonprofits. CHANGE Illinois is a coalition and alongside our diverse partners in more than 30 organizations, we long have advocated for an independent and transparent redistricting process that results in equitable maps.

The fight for fair maps is not new. In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan condemned the act of partisan gerrymandering. And in the past decade, President Barack Obama has continued to condemn partisan gerrymandering by both parties, doing so from the Illinois House chamber in 2016. Yet, here we are, on the eve of the redraw, without a single legislative move toward the ideals of two former Presidents from different parties.

The U.S. House Democratic majority has approved H.R. 1, which, in part, requires independent commissions to draw congressional districts due to states' inaction in combating racial and partisan gerrymandering. And here in Illinois, there's more support from your constituents for independent and transparent redistricting processes than ever before. A survey conducted by CHANGE Illinois last year found that 75 percent of Illinois voters support independent redistricting.

Shortly after being named the Chair of Illinois Democratic Party, Congresswoman Robin Kelly affirmed that she supported independent redistricting in a media interview. She co-sponsored and voted for H.R. 1. Governor J.B. Pritzker, while campaigning, said on multiple occasions that he supports independent maps. And, more recently, he and his staff have said he would veto partisan or gerrymandered maps. The newly-elected Speaker of the House, Emanuel "Chris" Welch, previously has sponsored legislation supporting an independent redistricting commission in 2016 and 2020.

With all of this support for independent and transparent redistricting, it's time that we break from the old way of drawing maps. Instead, we ask that maps be drawn that truly are in the best interest of people in communities across the state; that allow them to meaningfully participate in the process. We ask for a process that results in maps that empower people to elect candidates of their choosing. We have seen in Illinois and across the



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nation how redistricting can be weaponized against individuals, parties, communities, and people of color. We cannot continue down that path.

In order to meet these challenges, CHANGE Illinois worked with Senator Melinda Bush to introduce SB2554, a plan that would ensure more equitable maps than those of the past. No matter who is drawing the maps, there are a number of steps needed to ensure we have a fair mapping process. Our solution starts with robust public engagement, with a minimum of 35 public hearings across the state, and virtually, to give people ample ability to participate. People need more than simply the opportunity to testify, they need lawmakers to respond to their testimony and map submissions so they can understand whether their feedback is being used in map proposals considered by the General Assembly. Those organizing these hearings also should make sure that language access is not impediment to people participating.

SB2554 includes best practice fairness standards for mapping that prioritize compliance with the Federal Voting Rights Act and the Illinois Voting Rights Act to make certain that communities of color have the opportunity to elect their preferred candidates. It also includes consideration of communities of interest and geographic boundaries that already exist. And our solution calls for not drawing maps for partisan purposes, but instead prioritizes maximizing electoral competition. Historically, remapping has been used to shore up majority political power, leaving voters without choices on Election Day. In Illinois, our elections are woefully uncompetitive. Last fall, nearly half of the General Assembly elections were uncontested. Prior cycles were worse and redistricting contributes to this. Partisan gerrymandering, quite simply, is a form of voter suppression.

We ask this committee to again establish a website that makes public all information used in the remapping process, including testimony, map submissions by the public, proposals being drafted by the committee, and all other documents and communications relevant to its work. A compliance report must be issued with any map proposal describing how the plan meets requirements in the Federal Voting Rights and responds to testimony and maps submitted by the public. And there must be a period between the introduction of the proposed map and votes by the chambers to ensure that additional public hearings are held and the public has the time to understand and respond to proposed maps.

We also ask that you consider fixing the implementation date of the recently enacted No Representation Without Population Act, a law that will end prison gerrymandering. We should not deprive those who are incarcerated of their representation for another entire decade, when we can make the law effective now. After the bill was signed into law, the Department of Corrections said they have much of the information that is required, so why are we withholding representation from those who are incarcerated for another 10 years?

The need for remapping transparency and accountability only are underscored by the challenges from the Census Bureau's delay. It's been suggested by the National Conference of State Legislatures that lawmakers or map-drawing commissions, in other states, could use different data for map drawing and fix the maps later after the new census data is available.

The census data needed for legislative redistricting will not be available until September 30, 2021. The Bureau has given no indication it will be able to deliver that data earlier and officials have said on multiple occasions that they would not release the data in batches to prioritize states, such as Illinois, with stricter constitutional deadlines. Yet, we already have two public hearings scheduled by Senate redistricting subcommittees and



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there's been little indication as to what data the General Assembly will be using or whether it plans to attempt to delay the remap for the most current census data. How can we expect people to participate in the redistricting process when these critical details haven't been made available?

Should people in the Northern Illinois region be prepared to present testimony on what the districts in their area should look like by tomorrow's hearing? Should they have their community of interest map proposals ready for the subcommittee? Or is the hearing simply to talk about how the committee will conduct itself over the next few months? Will the Northern Illinois subcommittee follow the same process as the Southern Illinois subcommittee or will each committee be free to conduct itself differently without any uniform rules? None of the answers to these questions has been made clear, making it even more difficult for people to participate in the redrawing of their districts in a meaningful way.

It is imperative that more information be provided about how these hearings will be conducted, what will be discussed, and that greater notice is given to the public so people know how to participate. It is critical that lawmakers began engaging the public in the process but, at this point, it isn't even clear what these committees -- based on vague regions -- are responsible for overseeing. Some committees are based on counties, others on vague parts of counties or altogether vague regions. Given that this committee is charged with drawing maps, we would ask that you, at least, provide the public with a map of these regions so they know which hearings are relevant to them.

You have a responsibility to make it abundantly clear to the public they can participate. Our recommendation would be for subcommittees to postpone meetings until general guidelines and uniform rules are established to ensure members of the public have ample time to participate and to incorporate more transparency and accountability into the process.

Illinois' districts belong to the people and they have made clear they expect an independent and transparent process that values the principle of one person, one vote. We urge you to comply with their clear expectations.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to try to answer any questions that committee members might have.

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