



CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

Illinois Senate Committee on Redistricting

To: Chair Aquino and committee members

From: Ryan Tolley, Policy Director of CHANGE Illinois

Thank you Chair Aquino and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony about the remapping process for Illinois state and congressional districts. My name is Ryan Tolley and I am the policy director of CHANGE Illinois and the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund. Both are nonpartisan nonprofits that educate, engage and advocate for ethics and efficiency in governments and elections. 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.

There's now been two weeks of hearings that have covered almost half of the counties in Illinois. And although much of the state has been covered, participation by the general public at these hearings has not been nearly enough to ensure that these maps will accurately reflect the many diverse communities all over Illinois. There were a number of community and good government organizations whose representatives testified and all of us, independently, said these committee meetings need more transparency, but many questions remain unanswered.

Just today, the Chicago Tribune Editorial Board reported that sources told them that the Senate already has "its tentative map drawn," raising additional questions about how public input will be used. If the maps were already drawn, how can anyone be assured public input will be reflected in those maps that will form the foundation of our democracy for the next 10 years? If maps already exist, are they going to be made available now so that the public can weigh in on the map proposals at the upcoming hearings? If map proposals are being devised and not made publicly available, then that raises the question of what purpose these public hearings actually serve.

Senate leaders said before this process began that they are prioritizing inclusiveness and giving a megaphone to those who have been silenced. Yet, in two weeks of hearings to date, we've not seen any accommodation made for Illinoisans for whom English is not their primary language.

The public needs to understand how to participate starting today, rather than information slowly coming to light at each subcommittee hearing. The tool promised for the public to use in order to submit maps has just been made available right before today's hearing. Speaking from experience, it is going to take a lot of training to ensure that people can use the tool. We can't expect people to participate in tomorrow's Southern Illinois



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hearing with maps created from this portal. Should Illinoisans be using dated ACS data to draw maps to submit because that is what one of the other committee chairs said was being used last week?

It also has not been made clear whether subcommittees will meet again or if people unable to attend hearings on a mere six days notice would be provided with another opportunity to provide feedback to this body. Is the public going to have the opportunity to weigh-in on map proposals before the chamber takes votes?

We remain deeply concerned about how these proceedings have been conducted thus far. The public has not been given a meaningful opportunity to participate. Continuing down this path, in a piece-meal fashion, will result in a failure to meet the Senate leadership's stated goal of an inclusive process.

There are so many more people and communities who still are unable to participate and haven't been represented in the hearings so far. In the past few years, the state spent millions of dollars to get widespread engagement in the 2020 Census. Currently, the state isn't even doing a fraction of that to ensure people are aware of opportunities to participate in redistricting hearings that will influence how they are represented for the next decade.

Posting notice on government websites is clearly insufficient to reach the broad public participation that is needed.

It is imperative that more information be provided about how these hearings will be conducted, what data will be used, what will be discussed, and that more advance notice is given to the public about the hearings and about how to participate. Please consider making the invitation list public and advertise these meetings in the media.

We spoke a bit about in past hearings about our shared values of prioritizing communities of color in the remap, a transparent and accountable process, and making sure communities of interest are considered. Then why are we not requiring these ideals through state law rather than talking about them? In 2011, lawmakers didn't just talk about the need for improvements, they passed the Illinois Voting Rights Act. Why are we not seizing this opportunity, this moment, to ensure better remapping this decade and for the rest?

Illinois' districts belong to the people. They expect an independent and transparent process that values their input and creates maps that aren't based on politics, but are based on the needs of their communities. We again urge you to meet their clear expectations.

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