



Contact:
Griselda Vega Samuel
Midwest Regional Counsel
(312) 427-0701; Gvegasamuel@MALDEF.org

Public Hearing Testimony
Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
March 30, 2021

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Redistricting committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Griselda Vega Samuel, and I am the Midwest Regional Counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. MALDEF is a national civil rights law firm. For over 50 years, MALDEF has worked to protect the rights of Latinos through community education, advocacy and litigation. Our organization has been involved in Illinois redistricting since the 1980s. We regularly partnered with stakeholders representing diverse communities, developed model maps, and monitored the state's compliance with minority voting rights, particularly the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

We thank the committee for providing an opportunity to comment again on the impact of redistricting on the Latino community. MALDEF provided testimony at the first hearing on March 17th and at the Chicago South hearing on March 25th. At each of these hearings, we urged the committee to tell the public what data it will be using to draw the legislative maps. This is the sixth redistricting cycle since Illinois passed the modern constitution. Though always contentious, the redistricting process has been grounded on the fact that the legislature, advocates, and the public could view and work with the same data. By agreeing on the facts, our predecessors could offer principled and informed recommendations to protect minority voting rights and keep communities of interest together.

This committee has said that it is considering ‘all options’ for what data it will use to draw legislative maps. The committee has also said, numerous times, that it values transparency and welcomes public participation. We urge the committee to follow through with those professed values, and to tell the public about those data ‘options’ under consideration, and its timeline for publishing proposed maps.

We have heard this committee urge advocates to spread awareness of these hearings and to invite grassroots leaders and members of the public to testify about their interests. We share the desire to increase engagement in these hearings. So in recent conversations with our partners, groups traditionally involved in the redistricting process, time and again have shared that they are overstretched this year, not least of which is due to the COVID-19 relief work that many of them are undertaking with our most vulnerable communities throughout IL. Their main questions to us, specific to redistricting are - what data will the legislators use to draw the maps? What is the timeline? and if there will be opportunities to comment on maps once they are released - to which we have no answers.

We all know that the U.S. Census Bureau does not anticipate releasing the state redistricting files until August and September, months later than scheduled. But the maps that Illinois draws this year will be with us for a **decade**. The census data delay **does not** excuse the state from complying with the federal Voting Rights Act, constitutional requirements, and state law minority voting rights protections. There is no legal distinction between a ‘placeholder’ map and a future final map. We ask that the committee make full efforts to allow the people of Illinois to understand the redistricting process and offer meaningful statements about their interests. We need to follow the same data.

We offer the following recommendations:

1. Specifically describe the data and data sources that the Senate is considering using for the drawing of maps.
2. Correct the Senate hearings map to identify the boundaries between the subcommittee areas of Western Cook County and Northwest Cook County.
3. Provide at least two weeks between releasing a plan and holding a hearing to consider a plan, so the public can provide meaningful feedback.
4. To facilitate general public engagement, the process to sign up to testify should be CLEAR and SIMPLE. As a witness for today's hearing, I submitted my witness slip but had to send a separate email to receive the log-in information to be able to get on this zoom call. Nowhere on the witness slip instructions did it provide that second set of instructions to email for the information. I only knew this procedure given my work with the legislature. If this committee is to engage the public - it must be transparent.

Thank you for your time.