



CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

April 29, 2021

Illinois Senate Committee on Redistricting--Peoria, Tazwell, and Macon Counties

To: Chair Aquino and committee members

From: Syamala Krishnamsetty (she,her,hers), Advocacy Director of CHANGE Illinois

Thank you Chair Aquino and committee members for allowing me the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Syamala Krishnamsetty and I am the advocacy director for 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 of more than 30 organizations and we long have advocated for an independent, transparent redistricting process.

This week the U.S. Census Bureau announced the long awaited apportionment data that determines states' total population, number of Congressional representatives, and Electoral College votes. It was a day for every Illinoisan to be proud of the work that the state, in partnership with over 400 community organizations and thousands of census employees, did to ensure an accurate count for the 2020 census. The results were better than expected given our state total population is 12,812,508.

That exceeds American Community Survey (ACS) estimates of anywhere from 41,877 to 140,687. The Census count was a triumph; over 400 community and civil right organizations worked tirelessly against challenges brought by the pandemic, misinformation, and lies about the census to ensure that residents across the state were counted, particularly in hard-to-count communities.

In addition to that, the state invested 47.8 million to support that effort.

So, how do we go back to Illinoisans and say this is an inclusive process when, right out of the gate, we are going to say 140,000-plus of you will not be counted in political districts? That you will not be considered in the process because we're not using 2020 census data? We're essentially telling them that their voices don't matter.

Before it was just confirmed that Illinois is only losing one congressional seat, there was a very real concern, based on ACS projections, that Illinois could lose two congressional seats. What if the Census Bureau was taking the same tactic as Illinois and saying let's just use 2019 ACS projections to determine congressional representation? In doing so, the bureau would have silenced the voice of thousands and thousands of Illinoisans. So how can we accept that their voices should be silent now that we know the projections were wrong?



www.changeil.org

 [@changeil](https://twitter.com/changeil)

Even if we were to go to the low end and say only 40,000-plus people are not going to be counted in district mapping, that is unacceptable. To put it in perspective, Senate President Harmon wrote about the importance of keeping Oak Park in a single district during the 2011 remap. In the 2010 census, Oak Park's population was 51,878. To move forward with ACS data would be the equivalent of saying a town nearly the size of Oak Park is irrelevant to this process. As we have said before, there is a reason few witnesses are coming forth to affirm ACS as a viable alternative to the 2020 census data for redistricting.

We now know that the ACS estimates are inaccurate and not by a small amount. It is not too late to change course, do the right thing and wait for the 2020 census data. We can no longer look away from the issue and must meet the challenge head on.

It bears repeating that California anticipated these challenges last year. The state legislature sought and was granted relief from the courts on constitutional redistricting deadlines to accommodate the delays. The legislature then moved their primary election date in non-presidential elections to ensure that the maps could be determined prior to candidates filing to run for office.

Seeking court permission to move the deadlines back would give Illinois the opportunity to engage with community members in a meaningful way to educate them on the tools and resources available to draw and map their communities. We actually could give people a meaningful voice in the process.

Illinoisans deserve better than being in the company of states like Oklahoma and Missouri who are intent on using ACS data for pure partisan gain. PlanScore analyzed the maps released by Oklahoma's legislature and found the maps were so skewed that they gave one party a 13% advantage in the House and a 15% advantage in the Senate. Missouri reportedly is using ACS as a part of a larger anti-immigrant scheme. Illinoisans deserve better.

It is time for Illinois to change course and seek relief from the courts on the state's constitutional deadlines. It is time to wait for the 2020 census data. This is about ensuring that everyone in Illinois has a voice and that they have a say in who represents them. It's about upholding the Federal Voting Rights Act and ensuring that each person has an equal vote, upholding the one person, one vote standard.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit testimony.

Syamala Krishnamsetty
Advocacy Director
CHANGE Illinois



www.changeil.org

 @changeil