

Senate Redistricting Committee Hearing Remarks

October 8, 2021

I would like to begin by thanking Chair Aquino for his invitation to address the Senate Redistricting Committee. I would also like to thank Minority Spokesperson Barickman and the members of this committee for the chance to speak on the important topic of diversity and representation within the circuit courts.

Public Act 101-477, the law that required the judicial subcircuit boundary redistricting process that this committee and the General Assembly has started, had a simple purpose.

That purpose was to enact a process that ensured the judicial system reflects the diversity of the population that it serves going forward.

As some of you may remember, HB 2625 was a passion project of mine not long ago when I was its senate sponsor. But I was not the first legislator who saw the need to amend subcircuit boundaries to better reflect the latest census figures and the diversity of our communities. Leader Aquino and Rep. Arroyo were two of many members of the GA that sponsored legislation and worked tirelessly on this effort. I am happy to join you today and to see the GA moving forward and making progress that is long overdue.

The last time that the GA redrew these maps was in 1991. We all know that the population of Cook County has shifted dramatically over those 30 years.

And just like in 1991, the diversity of the bench does not mirror the county. According to data released by the Office of the Chief Judge of Cook County, only 20% of sitting circuit court judges are Black, 9% are Latino/Latina, and 3% are Asian. The remaining two-thirds of the judges are White. By comparison, Cook County's population is one-quarter Black, one-quarter Latinx, 8% Asian and only 40% white.

Subcircuit boundaries are an important tool to increase the diversity of those sitting on the bench. But that tool is useless if the boundaries dilute the diversity

of our communities and do not reflect the residents of the subcircuits. As the population evolves, the judicial system should reflect that evolution.

Judges uphold the laws of our state and residents should have a voice in who is entrusted to do this important work.

We know from studies that a more diverse bench leads to outcomes that are fairer, especially in a criminal justice system where defendants are disproportionately Black and Latinx. We know that this is true in civil cases, as well.

Within the current 15 subcircuits, there has been considerable demographic shifts captured by the 2020 census. But stop and consider the additional population

changes seen in the since the 1990 and 2000 census.

Since 1990, just in the City of Chicago, the Latinx population has increased by 50% and the Asian population by 92%. That's just one example of the shifts we're talking about. In addition, not only has the race and ethnicity of the city's and county's population changed, but where they live has also shifted in the past 3 decades.

In closing, the judiciary should reflect the population that it serves. It's wonderful that we now have a process to make sure that is the case. It's great that the GA will revisit this issue after each decennial census. This process will amend the boundaries of subcircuits to ensure that they keep up with changing demographics

and address the need for greater diversity on the bench going forward.

As Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County and a lifelong resident of Chicago, I can personally attest to the need for the face of justice to mirror the community it serves.

Thank you, I'm happy to take questions.