



CHANGE ILLINOIS ACTION FUND

Congressional remap should be led by community voices & the federal Voting Rights Act

October 8, 2021

CHANGE Illinois Action Fund Testimony

To: Senate Redistricting Committee

From: CHANGE Illinois Action Fund

Thank you, Chair Aquino, Vice Chair Sims and committee members for providing our organization with the opportunity to come before you to weigh in on the congressional maps. My name is Madeleine Doubek and I am the Executive Director for the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund and CHANGE Illinois.

Our first recommendation to this committee is to use the 2020 Census data as the basis for the congressional maps rather than American Community Survey (ACS) data. Ignoring advocates' previous warnings against the negative consequences of using ACS estimates as a replacement for 2020 Census data led to, for the first time since the state constitution was adopted in 1970, having two Illinois General Assembly redistricting maps signed into law within a matter of months. Lawmakers revisiting the legislative maps for a second time created additional confusion and alienated community voices from the process to a greater degree. People had even less time and opportunity to participate than were provided in the spring. Each time we come back here for another remap, the process should be improved as lessons are learned from previous mistakes.

Our second recommendation is that the committee pay particular attention to the federal Voting Rights Act and create a congressional map that honors and prioritizes that law. It would be in the best interest of the committee and the public for committee members to publicly announce the prioritization of all of the redistricting criteria they are considering so that Illinoisans can better understand the committee's intentions in drawing the map. Those criteria should prioritize the federal Voting Rights Act first and foremost. It breeds unnecessary distrust amongst the people when they have no information to help them make heads or tails of why district lines end up where they do. This committee has the opportunity to create maps that empower communities of color through the federal Voting Rights Act by drafting maps that empower those communities to elect candidates of their choosing. In previous congressional redistricting cycles, that didn't happen, forcing communities of color to pursue lengthy and costly legal avenues to achieve the representation they deserve. We must not forget that Illinois' first majority-Latino congressional district was created as a result of a lawsuit. We can save our communities a lot of time and resources by ensuring that the next decade of congressional districts respect and prioritize the federal Voting Rights Act ahead of any other considerations.

Our third and final recommendation is for this map to prioritize listening to community members and affording them a better opportunity to participate, particularly after a map proposal is released. Even

advocacy organizations that track remapping had trouble providing meaningful feedback on the legislative maps that were released and voted on within a day. There is absolutely no ability for everyday community members to have a meaningful say in their congressional maps if votes are again rushed right after a map is released in the coming weeks.

There needs to be a real and meaningful dialogue between lawmakers and community groups who come before this committee with recommendations for how their communities can best be reflected in the institutions that are here to represent them. We have not been able to find one group that participated in the legislative remap hearings that has publicly endorsed the legislative maps, but there are many who rejected those maps. How can we say a map is the best reflection of the interests of communities if almost every single community group that tries to engage says its members' voices were ignored and their communities were harmed? Their efforts should not be in vain.

We encourage this committee to provide a much greater level of transparency, time and community involvement than was seen in the legislative remap process. We encourage this committee to align its congressional remapping work more closely with the work of federal lawmakers who are pushing for the John Lewis Voting Rights and Freedom to Vote Act: Making sure to prioritize communities of interest, removing partisan gerrymandering from the process, and not prioritizing incumbent protection.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to offer suggestions. I am happy to answer any questions.

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CHANGE Illinois Action Fund