



CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

Illinois House Committee on Redistricting

To: Chair Hernandez and committee members

From: Madeleine Doubek, Executive Director of CHANGE Illinois

Thank you Chair Hernandez and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony about the remapping process for Illinois state and congressional districts. My name is Madeleine Doubek and I am the executive 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 Senate 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 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 the Senate and House committee meetings need more transparency, but many questions remain unanswered.

We appreciate the effort by the House to post their upcoming hearings with slightly more notice, but still we continue to have concerns about the lack of transparency and detail about the subject matter, how people should know who should show up to which committee hearings based on vague geographic areas, and how testimony will be reflected in map proposals. There has been no indication of what the process looks like after April 9th when the last House committee hearing is scheduled to take place.

A fair map doesn't result from simply holding hearings and to suggest otherwise is false. There has to be much more robust outreach to communities across the state to give people ample time to plan to attend. In the past few years, the state spent millions of dollars to ensure widespread participation in the 2020 Census. Currently, the state isn't 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 achieve the broad public participation that is needed.

Good government groups and community organizations are doing their part to notify residents, but it is challenging when we cannot answer basic questions. The people of Illinois need more public outreach. They need this committee to respond to their input and explain how it will be used in map proposals. People absolutely need to see map proposals weeks before votes are taken and they need to have the opportunity to weigh-in at additional public hearings after maps are made public.



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To date, partisan bickering has overshadowed any effort to provide meaningful participation. Rather than attempting to delve deeper into understanding witness testimony, Republicans have attempted to lead witnesses into saying that census data quality means we must wait and let the backup commission take over the redistricting process, while Democrats have tried to lead witnesses, who are using American Community Survey (ACS) Data for their submissions, to say that it is acceptable for the General Assembly to do the same for legislative and congressional maps. Since the General Assembly has decided to push forward with map-drawing, community members are left with no choice but to use ACS sampling data for their testimony.

We have been presented with two options by lawmakers: Either give up our democracy to a random draw, giving Republicans a shot to have unilateral control over map-making, or allow for maps to be pushed through by the Democratic majority using ACS data that never was intended to be used for drawing legislative maps. These are not and should not be our only options. As the employees from the National Conference of State Legislatures testified on March 17, the Illinois General Assembly could appeal to courts to grant a delay in constitutional deadlines to wait for census data. Elected officials could pass a law to push back our Primary Election Day and the petition filing period to ensure map drawers have enough time to draw maps before election filing deadlines. This is being done in other states, such as California and Oregon.

The Chicago Tribune Editorial Board reported this week that sources told them the Senate already has “its tentative map drawn,” raising additional questions about whether public input will be used. If they already are drawn, how can anyone be assured public input will be reflected in these 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 the public can weigh in on the map proposals at upcoming hearings? If map proposals are being devised and not made public, then that raises the question of what purpose these public hearings actually serve.

We need more accountability in this redistricting process. We need to ensure that the maps produced prioritize Federal and state voting rights acts and protect communities of interest. The people of Illinois need and want lawmakers to make it clear, in state law, that districts will be created without prioritizing incumbents or candidates from one party, whether that is for their benefit or harm. A compliance report is needed, explaining how maps meet these shared values, along with the value of prioritizing communities of color and those for whom English is not their primary language. Non English speakers continue to face impediments to participating in this process because accommodations have not been made for them.

It is imperative that more information be provided about how these hearings will be conducted and how these maps will be drawn. We ask this committee and the House to meet the challenges ahead so Illinoisans get a map that puts power in their hands.

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

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