

April 3, 2021

## ILLINOIS HOUSE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

**Good Afternoon, my name is Deborah Harrington. I am Co-Founder and serve as Co-Chair of Change Illinois (Coalition for Honest and New Government Ethics) and submit testimony as a private citizen who profoundly believes in participatory democracy, and on behalf of this statewide nonpartisan organization.**

Over the past few weeks a number of community and good government organizations whose representatives testified and all of them, independently, said the Senate and House committee meetings need more transparency, but many questions remain unanswered. After weeks of hearings, **it remains unclear how community members' testimony is going to be considered in map proposals being considered by lawmakers. Or whether or not community members will be able to weigh-in on map proposals before members take votes.** The hearings are taking place, but not near enough is being done to provide our communities with a seat at the table by lawmakers, and we would welcome this opportunity.

Our community cannot afford another decade of under representation at the expense of redistricting rs and not guided by community input. Particularly, for communities on the south side of Chicago that continue to face population loss in predominantly Black communities. We sought to fix part of this issue by ending the practice of prison gerrymandering, which was included in historic legislation passed at the beginning of the year and restoring some equity in representation for Black communities this decade. But sadly lawmakers have delayed representation for those incarcerated for another decade, ten more years! We should not and cannot force people to wait another decade to be properly represented.

I can think of no better guiding principles for this committee to follow than the **“REDISTRICTING REFORM PRINCIPLES” DEVELOPED BY A DIVERSE STATEWIDE GROUP CALLED THE ILLINOIS REDISTRICTING COLLABORATIVE** of which I was a member. These principles (below) represent the fundamental ideals and values we believe must be considered to inform drawing a map. I submit these essential principles as a critical guide for Illinois’ redistricting process and hope these ideals, conceived by concerned Illinois constituents, are given serious attention and applied as a guide in developing a map.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Deborah Harrington

Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Change Illinois

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**Illinois Redistricting Collaborative  
Redistricting Reform Principles  
August 31, 2017**

Representative democracy works best when the public actively engages with policy discussions and elections. Even a cursory look at Illinois' current process shows a system that favors incumbents and is dominated by partisan, rather than public objectives. Redistricting reform will offer diverse voices and independent thinkers an opportunity to serve. Breaking partisan gridlock and restoring functional state government is essential for Illinois' future and is an especially urgent call to action as we near the 2020 Census.

Redistricting plans must be drawn in a manner that allows Illinois residents, including communities of color, to elect candidates of their choice who represent and are held accountable to, the interests of that community. Fundamentally improving Illinois' redistricting process will strengthen our communities, foster a more robust democracy and restore public confidence in government.

Any meaningful redistricting plan must provide transparency and allow true public participation. However, we recognize that principles of voter choice, geographic cohesiveness and competitiveness can at times come into conflict with one another.

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The eight criteria below are presented in priority order to help guide considerations in Illinois' mapmaking:

### **1. COMPLY WITH THE U.S. CONSTITUTION**

**The process must be in accordance with the requirements of the U.S. Constitution.** All persons -- regardless of age, citizenship, immigration status, ability or eligibility to vote -- should be accurately counted through the Census. In accordance with the U.S. Constitution, districts should be populated equally, as nearly as is practicable.

### **2. COMPLY WITH FEDERAL AND STATE VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

**The process must emphasize representation and be fully compliant with both the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) and all state voting rights laws, including the Illinois Voting Rights Act.** The letter and the spirit of the VRA should be reflected in redistricting to protect the rights of voters of color. To advance these foundational goals, redistricting decision-makers should exercise their latitude under the law to create majority-minority, coalition, and influence districts.

### **3. COMPRISE AND UPHOLD A NON-PARTISANSHIP PROCESS**

**The process should be independent of partisan political considerations.** Mapmaking must include provisions and resources ensuring independence from political parties and legislative leaders. The process must include diverse decision-makers who reflect a broad range of viewpoints and who prioritize people and communities. Mapping consultants and software contracts, paid for with public resources, should be awarded on merit rather than partisan affiliation.

### **4. MAXIMIZE VOTER CHOICE, ELECTORAL CANDIDACY AND COMPETITIVENESS**

**The process should result in maximizing voter choice, encouraging electoral candidacy and enhancing electoral competitiveness.**

#### **5. RECOGNIZE AND PRESERVE COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST**

**The process should give consideration to true communities of interest.** To the extent possible, but secondary to the protection of voting rights, populations with common social, ethnic or economic interests and/or shared political and geographic boundaries should have unified representation.

#### **6. ACCURATELY INCLUDE PERMANENT RESIDENCE OF ALL ILLINOISANS**

**The process must accurately represent the permanent residence of all Illinoisans.** All persons residing away from their permanent residence, such as students, incarcerated individuals, and missionaries, should be counted at their home address regardless of Census counting rules. The Census should be encouraged to expand its exceptions to the usual residence rule to include incarcerated individuals, as well as students, missionaries, and overseas Americans.

#### **7. COMPRISE AND UPHOLD A TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE PROCESS**

**The process must be transparent and accountable.** Meetings of decision-makers, and their legal, political and mapping consultants, must be open and accessible to the public to the greatest extent possible. The criteria used to draw maps must be objective, clear and justifiable and districts must be drawn to offer voter choice. Communications related to the redistricting process should be subject to the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Clear conflict-of-interest rules must be adopted and applied.

#### **8. PROVIDE FOR OPEN, FULL, AND MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**The process must allow for meaningful public participation and have the confidence of the public.** Opportunities for public education and engagement must be provided, including opportunities to offer comment and amend draft maps. Redistricting bodies must provide data, tools and ways for the public to have direct input into and impact on the specific plans under consideration.