

## TESTIMONY ON REDISTRICTING

**TO:** Honorable Members of the House and Senate Redistricting Committees

**FROM:** Rabbi Shlomo Soroka

**RE:** Subject Matter On: 2020 Census and adjustments to the General Assembly Redistricting Act of 2021

**DATE:** Thursday, August 26, 2021

Thank you, Chairpersons, leaders and members, for this opportunity. On behalf of the Orthodox Jewish Orthodox Jewish community, I have testified before both Senate and House redistricting committees at prior hearings asking that we be consolidated into a single district to ensure this community of interest has a strong political voice. I also shared our concerns that our neighborhood would be further divided, resulting in diluting our voice that could render us politically irrelevant. After the preliminary maps were released in May, it appeared that our worst fears were to be realized. Following additional hearings that I testified at, some adjustments were made to accommodate our needs, and for that we are deeply grateful. The new maps, however, still siphon off thousands of our community members from the 16<sup>th</sup> House district where most of us reside.

The most significant and impactful difference between the 2011 Adopted Maps and the Enacted maps of 2021 is changes to the line that divides the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> house districts. The new line, which runs straight down Lincoln Avenue completely cuts off approximately 600 households, which is estimated to be over 3,000 constituents, from the rest of the community. Were the prior lines to be restored, hundreds of families would remain in the 15<sup>th</sup> House District but at least we'd be held harmless under the new maps. It is my understanding that based on the new Census data, the newly drawn 15<sup>th</sup> House District's exceeds the maximum population by approximately 1.1% and should therefore be conceding an area that contains 1.1% of its residents to a neighboring district. If the old line, which ran south down Drake Avenue was to be restored, it appears that would both remedy the population deviation and hold my community harmless in this process.

Of lesser significance but still noteworthy is a change on the northeastern border between Evanston and the City of Chicago. A small geographic area of the city that was formerly part of the 16<sup>th</sup> House District and 8<sup>th</sup> Senate District is now in the 18<sup>th</sup> House district and 9<sup>th</sup> Senate District under the 2021 Enacted Maps. As I mentioned earlier, these lines were already adjusted in response to the request of our community, and for that we are thankful. That being said, the proposal we shared was not fully adopted. It would be helpful if that district line could be moved over one block to the east. To keep the populations of each district the same, the

southern border of the 18th House district and 9th Senate District that protrudes into the city can be moved further south.

To clearly illustrate what we are requesting, I have submitted maps that illustrate the changes we are seeking, include a map of the entire 16<sup>th</sup> House district. These maps are based on current Census data and were created with the help of mapmaker Frank Calabrese.

The maps I submitted back in May remain the ideal map for our community, but if only minor adjustment will be made, I firmly believe that adopting these maps is a reasonable and fair expectation if this body truly believes in pluralism and cares to accommodate communities of interest.

To reiterate something I've said before this body on prior occasions, we are not asking that a district be drawn to elect an Orthodox Jew. Our goal is simply to be recognized as a "community of interest," and as a significant constituency, albeit a minority in the district, we can continue to have effective representation.

Over the last 10 years, our community has significantly grown, as the new Census data shows. We take our social responsibilities seriously and the public-private partnerships we've developed have proven beneficial to countless Illinoisans from all ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. But our growth and the success of these partnerships were only possible because we have been politically engaged and have had a voice in state government. To allow that voice to be diminished would not only hurt us but would hurt the interests of the state. To protect our voice in a chorus comprised of the diverse communities that live in the great State of Illinois, I respectfully ask you to adopt these proposals.

I'm happy to take any questions at this point and thank you again for this opportunity.