



CHANGE Illinois testimony on draft congressional map

October 20, 2021

CHANGE Illinois Action Fund Testimony

To: House Redistricting Committee

From: CHANGE Illinois Action Fund

Thank you, Chair Hernandez and committee members, for providing our organization with the opportunity to come before you to weigh in on the draft congressional map. My name is Ryan Tolley and I am the Policy Director for the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund and CHANGE Illinois.

As a part of my testimony today I want to review the [Princeton Gerrymandering Project's \(PGP\) analysis of the draft map](#) and provide some feedback on the congressional map proposal. The Princeton Gerrymandering Project is an organization based out of Princeton University that seeks to actively educate, provide resources, and help people nationwide to engage in the redistricting process. One of their resources is a free mapping tool for communities of interest called Representable. PGP also uses quantifiable metrics to review, analyze, and grade district maps in three overall categories: Partisan fairness, competitiveness, and geographic features.

In PGP's analysis, graded A to F, Illinois scored much lower than most other states. It only was matched by Texas. The Illinois draft map received an F in partisan fairness and geographic features and a C in competitiveness. The analysis found that the maps provide a significant Democratic advantage. Eleven of the draft districts are projected to be uncompetitive Democratic seats and three districts are uncompetitive Republican seats. For competitive districts, their analysis projects only three of the seventeen congressional districts will be competitive with all three competitive districts favorable to Democratic candidates.

The main part of the PGP's analysis I want to focus on is the geographic features section, where the Illinois draft map also scored an F. The grade uses a standard quantitative measure of compactness known as Average Reock. Higher Reock scores mean districts are more compact. The draft congressional map scored a .307 out of 1. The other factor measured is the extent of the numbers of counties split up in the draft map. The congressional map proposal splits up 42 of Illinois' 102 counties.

Splitting a county alone doesn't necessarily mean that a district is gerrymandered. For instance, Cook County and DuPage County have to be split due to their population sizes being larger than what is allowed in congressional districts to meet equal population standards. However, a district map with a higher number of split counties does raise questions about what goals mapmakers set out to achieve. The same goes for compactness. While a noncompact district doesn't guarantee a gerrymander, as



exemplified in the current 4th congressional district, it does raise questions about what is motivating the drawing of those borders.

The sheer lack of compactness is one of the more troubling aspects of the congressional map proposal. It seems to pit urban and rural areas of Illinois against each other at a time when we're already experiencing extraordinary polarization. One example out of many is the 17th district, which is not compact and splits 15 counties stretching from Rockford to Bloomington and not by simply going straight south. Instead, the district runs from Rockford in Northwestern Illinois, turns west to the Mississippi River, then runs down a narrow strip of Western Illinois to the Quad Cities and then cuts back east to capture Peoria and Bloomington. The proposed 17th district does not follow this path to empower communities of color as the district has a strong majority white voting age population (VAP) of 72.23 percent and includes a small fraction of Black VAP of 12.12 percent, a Latino VAP of 9.26 percent, and 2.57 percent Asian VAP. As defined by the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011, this district would fall short of being a coalition district that would give racial and language minority groups in the district the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice. If the goal is to connect communities of interest, it is not clear what commonalities are being prioritized that couldn't be achieved using cities or towns closer to either the northern or southern part of the district. If the goal was simply to connect urban voters, it seems it would have been much easier to go east from Rockford to create a district between Waukegan and Rockford or Rockford and Elgin. Connecting Waukegan to Rockford not only would have been closer geographically, but it would have reduced the need for thin swaths to ensure equal population requirements were met.

Last week, in prior testimony, we encouraged this committee to prioritize and publicize what criteria was being considered for each district. As the current map is drafted, it is difficult to determine any rationale for many of the districts absent any guidance from this committee.

We also previously asked committee members to prioritize the Federal Voting Rights Act in their mapping considerations. We do have strong concerns that this map falls short of that goal. According to the data released on the Illinois Senate and House redistricting websites, thirteen of the seventeen draft districts are majority white, including the 8th congressional district, which is just .2 percent shy of a 50 percent white majority threshold based on total population, but exceeds the 50% threshold in voting age population. For context, according to the 2020 Census, the total population of Illinois is 61.6 percent white. Roughly figured, that means three more districts possibly could have been drawn that would be non-majority white districts. We understand that people don't live in perfect square boxes, nor are we asking for you to overlay a perfect grid over the state of Illinois, but there are a handful of districts that are in close proximity to one another that include significant Black, Latino, and Asian populations, including districts 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11. We would encourage this committee to ensure that the Federal Voting Rights Act is prioritized in any additional drafts using voting age population data to truly empower communities of color to elect candidates of their choosing.



Our concerns over the level of community input have only heightened since our organization last gave testimony during the congressional remap hearings. These committee hearings continue to lack a real, meaningful dialogue with the people who have come to testify. After being shunned over and over again during the spring and summer, many community groups and advocates have given up on participating in this process. Without that input, people in communities are needlessly split up, their voting power is diluted and their representation stifled.

Please make a sincere effort in these final hours to reach these communities and show that you are taking their input seriously.

Thank you,

Ryan Tolley
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CHANGE Illinois Action Fund