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**Public Hearing Testimony**  
Illinois General Assembly  
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Members of the General Assembly,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Griselda Vega Samuel, and I am the Midwest Regional Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. MALDEF is a national civil rights law firm that works to protect the rights of Latinos through community education, advocacy, and litigation.

We have testified at several hearings of the Senate and House redistricting committees. MALDEF's position on redistricting has been clear, consistent, and shared by voting rights experts across the country – **it is never appropriate to use American Community Survey or other alternative data as the primary basis for redistricting.** We urge you to once again base redistricting on the decennial census data. The U.S. Census Bureau will soon release this information in a format known as the P.L. 94-171 file. That data file will contain the most accurate numbers, can be overlaid onto existing districts, and will be accessible to all.

We are disappointed that this Committee has chosen to repeat history by releasing maps on a Friday night in the twilight of the legislative session – ignoring requests from diverse groups for two weeks' time to review the maps. And to further highlight the lack of transparency, you released the Judicial Districts map two hours before this hearing. This body has declared, time and again, that you are “dedicated to transparency and public participation in the redistricting process.” But your actions prove otherwise. The Committee has not released population and demographic details for the proposed districts, nor has it made the raw data available.

There was discussion earlier, by expert witness Dr. Lichtman, who said that American Community Survey Data causes acceptable deviations when drawing those maps. We urge this committee to release the data files so that the public can see how much unequal representation you find acceptable. Why hide the data? The cornerstone of transparency and public participation in the redistricting process is the ability to compare the same data and make informed recommendations based on that data. As it stands, this Committee is asking the public for trust with no way to verify. The gold standard of transparency and accuracy in redistricting is the 2020 census data in the P.L. 94-171 file.

You hold the power to determine whether Latino communities can elect candidates of their choice or significantly influence elections in concert with other groups. If those objectives sound familiar, that is because they are required by the federal Voting Rights Act and the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011. We must recognize what those rights mean so they are not reduced to keywords in litigation, press releases, or talking points. Ensuring that Latino communities have the power to elect candidates of their choice or to significantly sway elections means that Latinos will have influence reflective of their numbers and legislators responsive to their concerns.

Latinos and other minority groups have a long history of being marginalized in redistricting and of being treated subordinate to partisanship and other concerns. The U.S. Supreme Court did not hold that state legislative districts must have equal population until 1964 – after 146 years of Illinois drawing unequal districts that packed minority residents. Congress soon thereafter passed the widely celebrated federal Voting Rights Act and the U.S. Census Bureau began allowing people to identify as Hispanic with the 1980 census. However, in Illinois legislative redistricting Latinos were immediately told they would not be respected. In 1982, Latino residents, including future Senator Miguel del Valle, challenged a plan that split Chicago

Latino neighborhoods into numerous districts to effectively dilute Latino votes. Thankfully the court did not accept the defendants' rationale that Latinos were adequately given districts that, like children's "snowsuits," would eventually fit them – a justification never applied to any other group. We should not take for granted the hard-fought gains of the past 40 years.

Members of the General Assembly, you have been faced with events and challenges unprecedented in the history of our country. Illinois is one of the first states to redistrict and will set precedents nationally and for future redistricting cycles. You can still build on the gains of our predecessors, who struggled to ensure that Latino communities have an effective voice in government. Know that the decennial census data is the only acceptable standard for redistricting. Any map based on American Community Survey estimates would very likely cause retrogression – a decline – in the ability of Latino communities to elect candidates of their choice or to significantly influence elections, and would likely invite litigation. MALDEF urges you to once again base redistricting on the decennial census data. It's time the General Assembly finally put away the snowsuits, and give Latino communities the representation we accurately deserve today – We are the majority-minority. Our time is now.