

TESTIMONY ON REDISTRICTING

TO: Honorable Members of the House and Senate Redistricting Committee

FROM: Rabbi Shlomo Soroka

RE: Subject Matter On: Communities and the proposed boundaries of Illinois Districts - North Chicago.

DATE: Tuesday, May 25, 2021

Chairman and honorable members of this committee:

“Fair maps” is a concept that legislative leaders and members of Illinois’ General Assembly have pledged to uphold. Legislative maps are only “fair” if drawn in a way that does not silence communities. Keeping “communities of interest” together ensures equity and diversity in government and is vital for our Democracy and especially our diverse state. Communities were encouraged to engage in the map making process through participating in multiple hearings and submitting proposed maps. Like many others, we were told our input was wanted and would be given all due consideration. On behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community, I [testified](#) before the Senate and House redistricting committees, [drew and submitted maps](#), reached out to numerous legislators and did everything within my power to convey the importance of keeping our community together in a single compact and contiguous district. The leading rabbis in our community- all 60 of them- [signed a public letter](#) asking for our community to be consolidated into a single district and concluded with a plea that we shouldn’t be divided further.

We trusted our input was being listened to and were optimistic that our request would be accommodated. When the maps were unveiled, however, we were somewhat astonished to see that not only were the improvements we asked for not made, and not only were we not further consolidated, but the exact opposite was done. We were further split and divided, perhaps near the brink of political irrelevance.

Please allow me to explain:

- While most of our families currently reside in the 16th House District, a line dividing the 16th and 15th house districts runs through the heart of Peterson Park, effectively cutting off a few hundred families. We asked that the line be moved over a few blocks to incorporate these households into the 16th. However, instead of being included with the rest of the community, the remaining couple hundred families in Peterson Park were siphoned off into the 15th House District, completely splitting the community neighborhoods.

- We asked that our 500 Skokie families be included in a contiguous and compact district that would connect it with our other neighborhoods. This request was not accommodated.
- On the Northern boundary of the 8th Senate District/16th House District where the City of Chicago borders Evanston, a strip of city blocks containing over 200 families was surgically removed and annexed into Evanston's 18th House District/9th Senate District where we previously had virtually no presence.

It may be difficult at this late hour to fully accommodate our requests, but I would ask you to find reasonable alternatives on our northern border with Evanston, such as annexing the area a few blocks farther East, from Rockwell, and go deeper into city territory, where fewer community members reside. It is extremely important that our families in Peterson Park are not cut off from our neighborhoods in West Rogers Park and Lincolnwood. These areas are not only contiguous, but they are also cohesive, and interdependent. I am sure that if our concerns are taken seriously, there are other lines that can be slightly adjusted without compromising the political voice of a community to the extent the current proposal does.

I will not rehash the testimony I have already delivered in prior redistricting hearings. It is there for the record and speaks for itself. The only part I feel compelled to repeat is that the Orthodox Jewish community is one that unfortunately is often overlooked as a community of interest, despite our unique needs and interests. The purpose of my testimony today is to bring to the committee's attention what I hope to be a simple and inadvertent oversight and ask that this injustice is not repeated and exacerbated. I do not believe these changes were done with the intention to silence my community, but I need this honorable body to know that regardless of the intent, the effect will be the same.