



**TESTIMONY BY THE ASIAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE
BEFORE THE ILLINOIS SENATE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE
APRIL 6, 2011**

Submitted By:

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I. INTRODUCTION

Asian American Institute (AAI) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony during the 2011 redistricting process. We urge the Illinois General Assembly to give meaningful consideration to the input of Asian Americans, not just at these initial hearings but also after draft maps are released.

AAI is a pan-Asian, non-profit, non-partisan organization located in Chicago whose mission is to empower the Asian American community through advocacy, research, education, and coalition-building. AAI testified at the Committee's hearing on March 28, 2011 about why redistricting matters to our community, legal protections of our voting rights, current demographics of Asian Americans in Illinois, the need for transparency throughout the redistricting process, and our commitment to working with other minority groups. We refer to and incorporate our March 28 testimony, which is available upon request from AAI and is also posted at the following website:

http://aaichicago.org/images/LegalAdvocacy/3-28-2011_redistrictingtestimonies.pdf.

II. NORTH CHICAGO, SKOKIE AREA, AND DES PLAINES AREA CLUSTERS

You are all by now familiar with the example of the Greater Chinatown area in Chicago, a cohesive community that has experienced unfair fragmentation. We are also



here, however, to bring your attention to three other compact but fragmented Asian American communities whose residents have common ground in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social concerns.

The maps attached to this testimony show the boundaries of these three community clusters – called North Chicago, Skokie Area, and Des Plaines area – that should each be kept intact and not fragmented during redistricting. As can be seen on attached maps, not only is there a high concentration of Asian Americans in these areas, but there is also a plethora of institutions in the area that are vital to our community members, including non-profit organizations; religious institutions; schools; and ethnic media, retail, and commercial outlets. The demographics of these clusters appear in a chart attached to this testimony, and this provides a striking illustration of the concentration of Asian American communities and the corresponding fragmentation that they face. The clusters contain between 24% and 31% Asian Americans and are currently each splintered into three to five Illinois House districts. It should be noted that the cluster lines are not district lines proposals; each cluster makes up less than an entire district and should be incorporated into a district.

In order to determine these specific cluster boundaries, AAI has spent significant time consulting community leaders who live, work, and serve residents in these areas, including but not limited to Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment, Cambodian Association of Illinois, Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, Hamdard Center, Indo-American Center, Korean American Resource and Cultural Center, Muslim Women’s Resource Center, Nepali Pariwar, and South Asian American Policy and Research Institute. AAI also has discussed and is continuing to discuss these boundaries with other minority communities, including Latino and African American communities represented by Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations.



As shown by recently released Census data, the districts in this area (namely, Illinois House Districts 15, 16, 17, and 57, and Illinois Senate Districts 8, 9, and 29) all faced loss of population or their population stayed the same between 2000 and 2010.¹ However, each of these same areas experienced significant growth of Asian population, ranging from 10% to 32% growth.² This demographic trend points to the need to protect the voting rights of these Asian Americans and consider their input when redrawing these lines.

The residents in the areas represented on the attached maps have common ground not just in terms of race, but also in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social issues.³ Most of the Asian Americans in this area are Asian Indian, Korean, or Filipino.⁴ There are also clusters of Pakistani, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian American residents in these areas.⁵ Languages spoken in the area include Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Punjabi, Malayalam, Bengali, Telegu, Nepali, Tagalog, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. Even though there is diversity within these communities, Asian Americans are a cohesive group that share many common concerns, such as the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate social services, as well as concerns about education, affirmative action, immigration, discrimination, hate crimes, and racial profiling. Residents of these particular areas of Chicago and suburban Cook County face similar social problems, including limited access to public transportation; low income; and limited English proficiency and linguistic isolation.⁶ People in these areas also have other unique concerns that unite them, including concerns about small, minority-owned

¹ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010. It should be noted that AAI inadvertently made an error in its March 28, 2011 testimony regarding the overall change in population in the specified districts; the statement in the text of today's testimony contains the corrected statement regarding the specified districts.

² U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

³ *See, e.g.*, WEST RIDGE COMMUNITY SURVEY, University of Illinois Extension - Cook County (Oct. 2007) (research study analyzing data and collecting input from over 90 residents of West Ridge as well as several community organizations, over the course of eleven one-hour focus groups and over 700 comments about life in West Ridge); U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

⁴ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *See, e.g.*, WEST RIDGE COMMUNITY SURVEY, University of Illinois Extension - Cook County (Oct. 2007); U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.



businesses; commercial corridors and business development; cultural diversity and demographic change; residential development and public spaces; government services; crime; and education.⁷ These areas are a gateway for many immigrants and new citizens who are in the process of adjusting to the United States.

III. NORTH CHICAGO CLUSTER

The Asian American community that we have defined as “North Chicago” contains people of Filipino, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese, and Pakistani backgrounds. These groups vary in terms of population, and Filipino Americans and South Asians (Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans included) reside in the largest numbers. As it is seen on the attached map, this contiguous area is currently split into five different Illinois House districts and three Illinois Senate districts.

We are providing a few examples today to illustrate the cohesiveness of this geographic area. Many of Filipino residents in both in the West Ridge neighborhood and Albany Park neighborhood feel strong connections to each other, and the same is true for the South Asian residents of the respective neighborhoods. Many of the Filipino residents in West Ridge go to Albany Park for Filipino groceries and other retail outlets. Also, many Filipino residents in West Ridge are members of Catholic parishes in Albany Park. Similarly, the South Asians living in West Ridge frequent Albany Park to visit places of worship. Many West Ridge residents send their children to religious school in Albany Park. Major South Asian media outlets are located both in Albany Park and West Ridge, all addressing similar issues in the collective community.

Asian American residents in the North Chicago cluster have similar social issues and interests, as many of them are recent immigrants who have working-class lifestyles. Thus, it is natural that over the past several years, there have been pan-Asian coalitions

⁷ *Id.*



formed with members of these communities to work on civic engagement and voter participation programs. For example, for the 2010 Census, organizations in Albany Park and West Ridge, among others, came together to conduct Census outreach in 10 different languages, making it the most accessible Census campaign in history for the local Asian American population. For the 2011 mayoral election in Chicago, many of the same Asian American organizations came together to educate voters in Albany Park and in West Ridge, and many of the residents in these neighborhoods united at the first ever Asian American Mayoral Candidates' Forum. Over 1000 Asian American Chicagoans attended this forum to hear what the candidates had to say about issues that mattered to their community such as public safety, public education, funding for immigrant integration social services, and support for small businesses.

The Asian Americans in North Chicago identify as one unified community of interest and will be better represented when they are not broken up into five Illinois House districts and three Illinois Senate districts. AAI has provided and will continue to provide information about all three clusters in future testimony.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Asian American community is deeply concerned about having an equal opportunity to elect representatives of our choice. Many community leaders and organizations have testified or are testifying today with details about our cohesive communities and the great harm that we face as a result of unfair vote dilution. Asian American Institute urges the Committee to remain mindful of our rights and give us a meaningful opportunity to review and respond to draft maps.

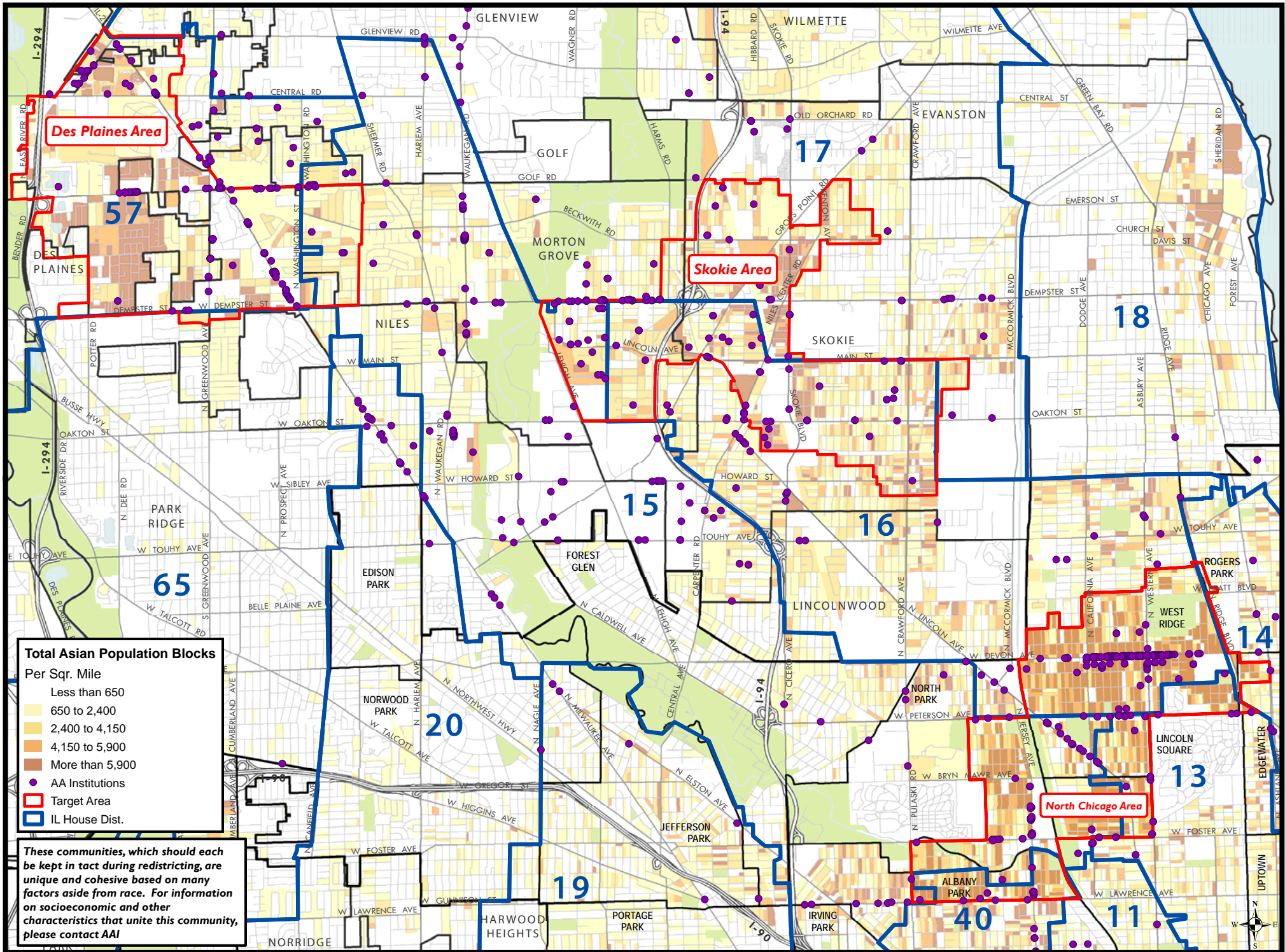


Cluster Demographic Breakdown

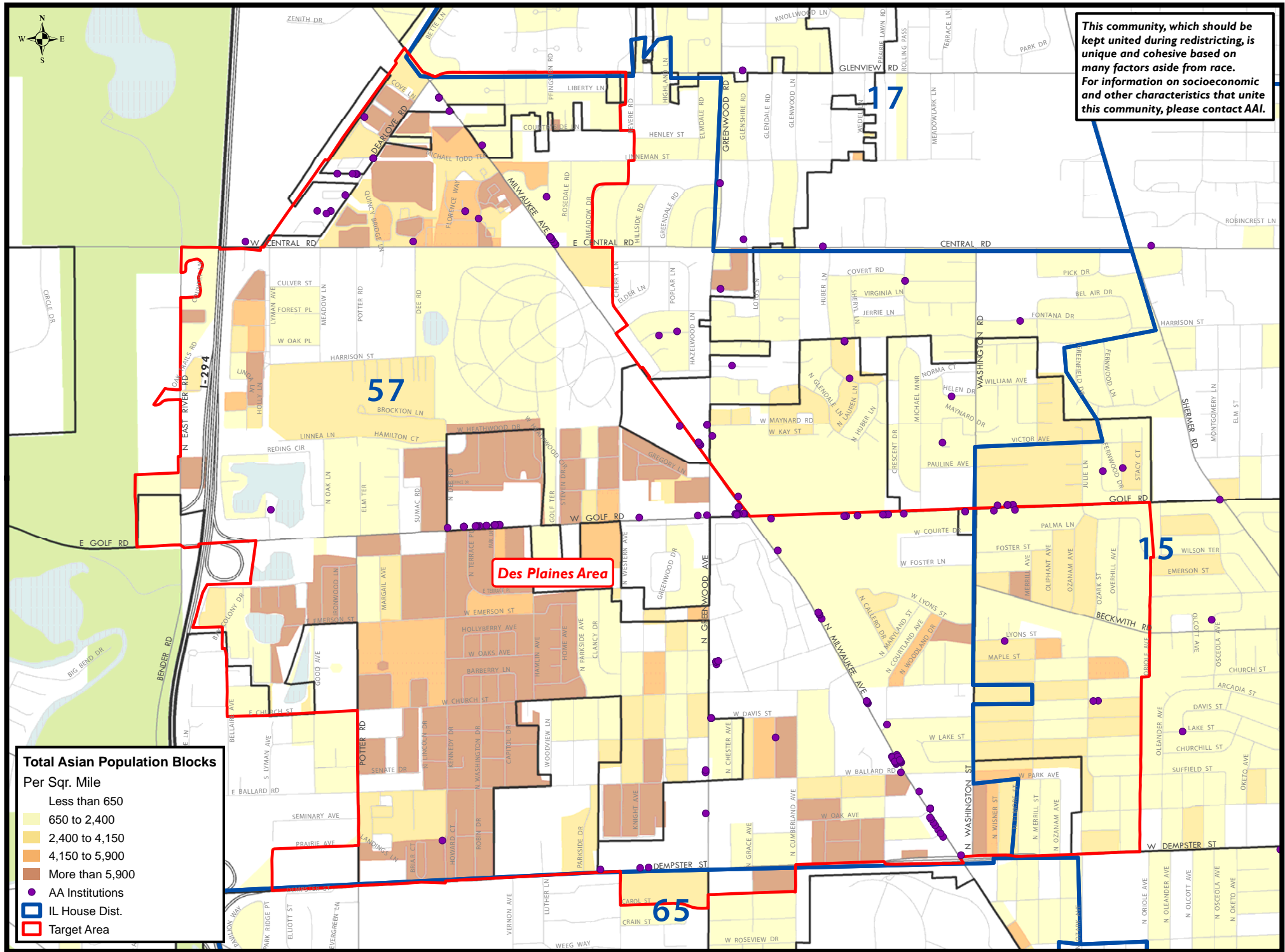
	Total	Latino	%	White	%	Black	%	Asian	%	% Total Cook County Asian Population	IL House	IL Senate	Total Sqr. Miles	Asia Pop. Per Sqr. Mile
Des Plaines Area	41,949	5,889	14	20,127	48	1,849	4	12,805	31	4.0%	57, 65, 15	29, 33, 9	4.1	3,123
Skokie Area	40,541	3,777	9	20,671	51	2,617	6	12,094	30	3.8%	15, 16, 17	8, 9	4.1	2,950
North Chicago Area	90,958	24,186	27	33,374	37	7,895	9	22,281	24	7.0%	13, 14, 15, 16, 40	7, 8, 20	3.9	5,713
Chinatown	89,903	27,074	30	24,763	28	9,353	10	27,420	30	8.6%	1, 2, 5, 6, 9	1, 3, 5, 13	6.6	4,155
Total	263,351	60,926	23	98,935	38	21,714	8	74,600	28	23.4				

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

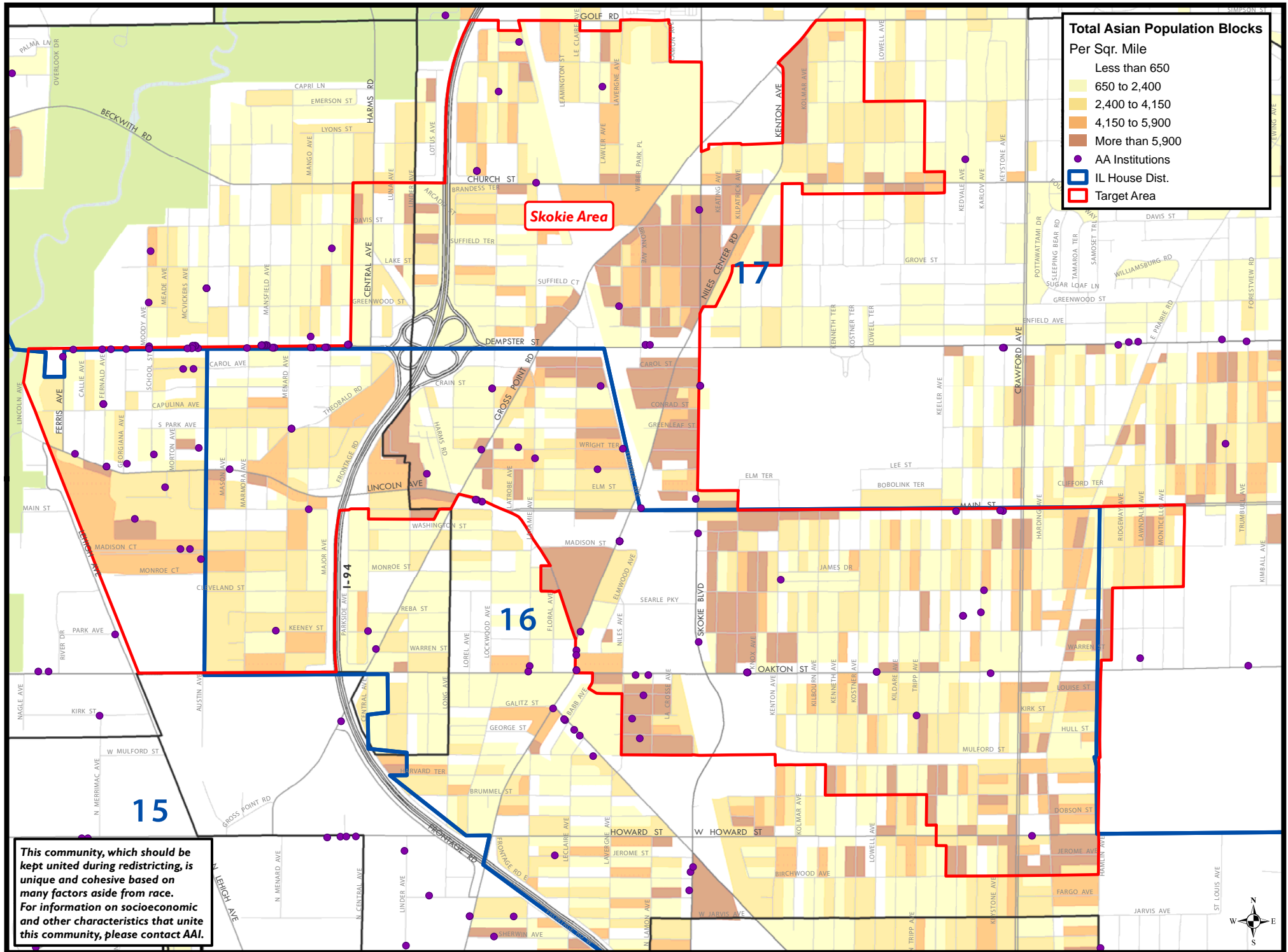
AAI Target Areas Map



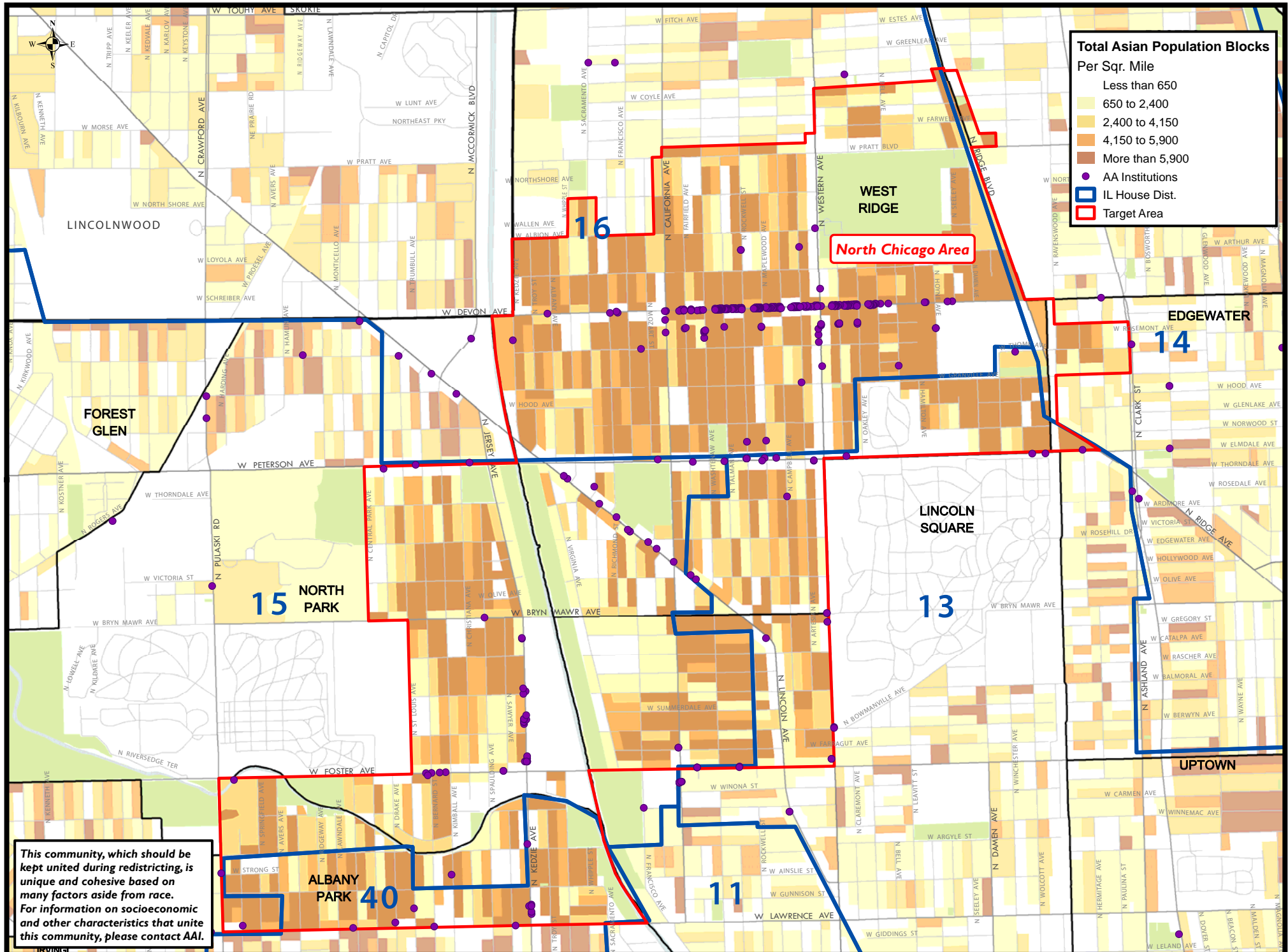
Des Plaines Area Map



Skokie Area Map



North Chicago Area Map



This community, which should be kept united during redistricting, is unique and cohesive based on many factors aside from race. For information on socioeconomic and other characteristics that unite this community, please contact AAI.

Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee Hearing April 6th, 2011.

Dear Chairman Senator Raoul and members of the Senate Redistricting Committee,

First of all thank you for allowing me to speak here today. What has brought me here is continuous and consistent restlessness, insecurity and a sense of loss which haunts most of my community members in their newly adopted country, simply because they don't have any voice in any public office at the local, state and federal level. This is predominantly because of the present district lines which cut them into smaller groups, not because of any lack of political and social activism.

Let me give you a brief history of my involvement and quote an example to emphasize what I am trying to prove.

I have been involved with the South Asian Community in the Chicago area since 1990. I have lived in the north side of Chicago since that time. I ran a community broadcasting network since 1994, started first ever local Pakistani Urdu TV program in 1994, and first ever Urdu/Hindi talk show in North America in 1997. I write in more than two ethnic news papers and correspond for 4 television networks. I have been a board member of human services organizations like Hamdard and Metropolitan Asian Family Services. I am part of Community Builders, a very active group of South Asians mainly from India and Pakistan, which organizes seminars and workshops to educate the community at large on political, social, civic and mental health issues. My relationship with my community is more than casual. I am a social and political activist, a journalist and a resident of Rogers Park in the West Ridge area. I have seen Devon Avenue as a thriving business district and I am seeing its decline now.

In 1999 during a meeting of business and community leaders on TIF funding, when I confronted the Alderman of 50th Ward Mr. Bernard Stone against his one sided attempt to impose zoning on the side streets of Devon Avenue during day time hours and pointed out that it will kill the businesses. He responded that the business owners are not his constituents and he doesn't care about them. He only cares for his voters. Mind you all those businesses were bringing revenue and providing jobs to the local residents, mostly South Asians. Since then the parking situation and its accompanied hazards have killed this business district. The profound effects of parking problems in this area have been analyzed and documented in the 2007 West Ridge Community Survey (on file with the Asian American Institute). Similar lack of responsiveness from not just city but also state officials makes it quite difficult for community members to have their problems resolved effectively.

The South Asian community is increasing in number in the Rogers Park, West Ridge, and Albany Park neighborhoods at a phenomenal rate. This area is referred to as the "North Chicago" cluster in Asian American Institute's testimony being submitted today. The upward movement of this group towards north is also part of this social phenomenon, increasing the South Asian population in the near north suburbs of Lincolnwood, Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles and Des Plaines, which are partly encompassed in the "Skokie Area" and "Des Plaines Area" clusters as defined by Asian American Institute. Our religious and educational institutions, social service organizations and many small and large businesses are in these areas. They have their unique social needs and humanitarian issues. There are seniors who could not communicate or participate with the outside world because of the language barrier and become prisoners in their own homes. There are newly immigrated women raising children but lacking communication with their teachers or health care workers because of language and other social hurdles. There are undocumented kids, hundreds of them, suffering for what they haven't done consciously or intentionally. There are even men who couldn't assimilate in the system because of lack of language and social skills or some other communicative problems. There is domestic violence, child and parent abuse which most of the time go unnoticed. These are just a few examples of the growing need for culturally and linguistically appropriate social services, services that are threatened when legislators do not feel accountable to our community.

Honorable members of the committee, our country is going through a critical time which puts national security on top priority. Our security agencies and diplomatic missions need people with multilingual and multicultural skills. By neglecting the local populations of immigrants and their children, we are failing to nurture people who could be very useful for national security and other beneficial purposes.

These social, cultural and educational deficiencies cannot effectively be dealt with by dividing similar populations instead of uniting them.

If you divide communities of interest you promote social and cultural ailments, and if you keep them together you promote a healthy environment for their social and communal growth.

All Asians whichever country or region they come from share lots of common values. They face almost the same problems and hurdles as immigrants. You have the power to facilitate in creating districts which could help these people to get maximum benefit of our system to promote their social, cultural and educational well being. This will help create a healthy state and nation.

Honorable members of the committee let me address something which seems probably not directly related to redistricting but have an indirect relation. I belong to a community

which is continuously under surveillance since 911. I will not deny the presence of religious extremism in a minority of the Muslim population, same like it is found in any other faith group but the majority of my community is as American and as liberal as any other person of a different faith. It is easy for extremist elements to take advantage of a discontented, disrespected, disregarded, distressed and divided community by exploiting the injustices and disparities, insecurity and poverty. It is very difficult to take advantage of a united, harmonious and satisfied community. It is you honorable members of the community who can give them this harmony and strength.

Asian American Institute, Council of Islamic Organizations and many grass root organizations are working hard to help the legislators in identifying justified legislative districts. The Pakistani, Indian and Bangla Deshi community of the North side of Chicago endorses these efforts and hope that the legislators would work closely with these grass root organizations

Thank you.

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**Testimony to Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Ahlam Jbara, Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago
April 6, 2011**

Good Morning Chairman Raoul and Senators. Thank you for holding this hearing and giving us the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ahlam Jbara and I am the Associate Director of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago as well as an active member of the Arab and Muslim Community. I am also on the board of Project Mobilize a C4 civic engagement organization; the Arab American Action Network, a social service organization on the south side of Chicago. I have worked and volunteered in our diverse ethnic communities for over 13 years providing social services, teaching English and Citizenship classes, providing leadership development training for the Arab youth, organizing non-partisan civic engagement efforts and worked around issues like racial profiling and language access for limited English speakers.

I am here today on behalf of the CIOGC and our ethnically diverse members; the CIOGC is a membership institution of 53 mosques; full time accredited schools; social service, civil rights and advocacy organizations state wide. The Muslim American community is estimated at 400,000 and growing in Illinois. Muslim Americans are very diverse from native born to minorities from the Arab-American, African-American, African Immigrants, Latino American and Asian-American populations.

There is cohesiveness within the Muslim American community at large. We come from different countries and ethnic backgrounds, but we share many cultural and social similarities. The diverse Muslim community is in various clusters in Chicago and neighboring suburbs. As you heard earlier, the Asian American Institute is testifying today about the growing population of Asians in the Greater West Ridge area of Chicago, as well as the growing Asian population in nearby suburbs such as Skokie and Morton Grove. There is a large Arab Community in the Southwest Suburbs of Bridgeview, Oak Lawn, Burbank, and Justice areas. It is crucial and imperative that our voice and vote not be diluted.

In the above mentioned areas there are schools and institutions that organize our communities that fall under the umbrella of the CIOGC. We have seen and heard the issues that our community members face such as the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate social services, especially for limited English Speakers; the need for cross cultural communications and understanding; the need for increased English and Citizenship services, effectively serving students in schools with high Asian, Arab and African populations, and the need to be heard by our elected officials.

Division of our community through redistricting will erase our voices, and make it even more challenging to organize and unite on common issues. This will in turn affect our ability to conduct voter registration campaigns, mobilize registered voters, and educate our community members about the electoral process. Our social and religious institutions built within already established communities and serve to help disseminate critical information relating to social services like English/citizenship classes, job training programs, social events, political events, youth events, etc. Our communities face a host of common issues such as the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate social services, especially for people with limited English proficiency and people new to this country.

If the district lines divide these integral community institutions, it will be an additional challenge for our community to overcome. District lines will have a direct effect on how responsive elected officials will be to our needs. For example, we have been working to establish relationships with State Senators and Representatives on the Southwest side (city and suburbs) and near the Devon community in Chicago. They understand our issues such as civil rights, zoning, social services, English and citizenship classes, language access, protecting the undocumented and having a voice in the process. Such responsiveness from legislators can only improve if we are united into fewer districts.

The Arab, Asian, African American, and Latino communities have taken initiative over the past few years to organize our community members, develop our youth in civic engagement, increase the number of registered voters, conducting voter education and get out the vote campaigns, increasing our involvement with the electoral process. There are overlapping populations within the Muslim American community and the Asian American community, and there are similar cultural and social concerns that both groups share. For that reason, AAI and other pan-Asian efforts seek input of the Muslim American community during various projects relating to civic engagement, including Census outreach, voter education, and redistricting advocacy.

I hope our testimony today and our years of activism and organizing is taken into account by this committee in the redistricting process. We are unique as an ethnically diverse but still distinct and cohesive community of interest; the CIOGC is focused on the people and our community. We want to be treated fairly during the redistricting process, it is important that the redistricting process is transparent. District lines have a real impact on whether we as minorities can participate in government and make a positive difference in our communities. We want to be grouped together so that we can elect candidates of our choice who can be responsive to our needs. We worked with Asian American Institute to create maps with specific boundaries, and AAI will present those maps to the committee.

Thank you.

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