



ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SERVICES

"CONNECTING SERVICES WITH NEED"



Arab American Family Service
9044 S. Octavia Ave.
Bridgeview, IL 60455

Honorable Chair Members,

April 28, 2011

My name is Nareman Taha and I'm the Co-Founder and Director of Development, along with my business partner Itedal Shalabi, of Arab American Family Services, (AAFS). AAFS is a nonprofit social service agency founded in 2001, provides caring, compassionate assistance to (South Suburban) Chicagoland residents, with special sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic needs of Arab Americans. AAFS offers support in the areas of public benefits, immigration, domestic violence, mental health, and elderly services and sponsors outreach programs to build healthier families and communities. As a locally focused, nonpolitical and nonreligious agency, AAFS takes a leading role in building bridges respect and understanding between Arab-American and mainstream-American cultures. We not only assist Arab speakers in their native language and dialect, we are increasingly recognized by government agencies and other nonprofits as the best local resource for cultural exchange and translation services. AAFS serves as a catalyst for social change by actively seeking to confront the myths and taboos that have kept some Arab Americans from obtaining the assistance they need. By helping local neighbors overcome personal crisis, strengthen their families, and live healthier, more successful lives, Arab American Family Services is making a profound and positive impact in our community.

I'm a resident of the city of Palos Park located in the Southwest suburbs of Cook County. I have been living in the southwest suburbs for over 15 years, and I have served the Arab American community within the Southwest Suburbs for over 11 years. Through my work and day to day of community involvement, I have seen the community significantly grow in population as well as its respective institutions.

As the community expands and increases, community organizations, businesses, schools, entertainment venues also increase in order to meet the needs of its community members at all levels. One example: in the city of Bridgeview with a population of 16,446 there exists a Mosque serving over 4,000 members from the surrounding suburbs, two Arabic schools, a Food Pantry, and also AAFS. In addition, through the work of our social service organization, **AAFS in 2010 served 19,325 individuals from the following Southwest suburbs of Cook County: Oak Lawn, Bridgeview, Chicago Ridge, Burbank, Worth, Justice, Hickory Hills, Palos Hills, Orland Park, and Tinley Park (see attachment AAFS Clients' Demographics).** This is where the community is. In the southwest suburbs of Cook County, businesses and community



Arab American Family Services
9044 S. Octavia Ave.
Bridgeview, IL 60455

organizations are populating streets from 76th Street and West of Cicero to La Grange Rd., and
ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SERVICES Palos Park and 183rd St and Will Cook Rd.

"CONNECTING SERVICES WITH NEED"

In the Southwest suburbs, Arab Americans make up close to 150,000 Arab Americans both Muslim and Christian, considering this is an undercount since Arab Americans are classified as **white**. Arab Americans originate from 22 Arab countries that share many common concerns, such as the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate social services, as well as concerns about education, health care, immigration, discrimination, hate crimes, and racial profiling. As the community grows, and it is spread across multiple elected officials, this makes the work for community organizations like ours very difficult. The reality of multiple officials may differ in opinions or they might not have the community's interest at best. As a result, community issues go unresolved. Overall, sporadic communities have very little impact and have little power and are not able to influence change. We ask that our elected officials be fair in the redistricting process, and keep immigrant communities like ours together. This is the time to encourage groups like Arab Americans increase their population in Illinois' political life. I hope this redistricting process can be part of that increased participation.

Arab American Family Services, Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago and Project Mobilize and testify today with details about our rising population and the devastating harm that we face as a result of unfair vote dilution. The fair representation of our community is a crucial step in having our unique needs effectively addressed.

- Our respective legislators need to keep Arab American communities whose residents have common ground in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social concerns and who should be kept together in one single district during redistricting.
 - **District 1: Bridgeview, Burbank, Chicago Ridge, Oak Lawn, and Justice**
- There are also clusters that represent a significantly high population of Arab Americans that share and have common grounds in terms of history, ethnicity, language and cultural and social concerns which should be kept together in the Southwest Suburbs of Cook County:
 - **Cluster 1: Hickory Hills, Palos Hills, and Worth**
 - **Cluster 2: Palos Park, Palos Heights, and Orland Park**

AAFS and the above community organizations will be providing you soon with maps that reflect the cities. Also, please see the attached documents in reference to the community populations as reported by Arab American Institute.

Nareman Taha
Co-Founder/Director

According to the Office of Management and Budget's federal guidelines on race and ethnic measurement, persons from the Middle East and North Africa are considered White/Caucasian by race. When filling out the Census, some Arab Americans choose to select "Some Other Race" and write in their ethnicity or countries of origin. Although these responses are tabulated by the Census Bureau, by law they must be reassigned to an existing race category for purposes of published reports, redistricting, etc. AAI is working with the Census Bureau to get access to these Arab responses to "Some Other Race" for research purposes.

As a community, Arab Americans have a strong commitment to family, economic and educational achievements, and making contributions to all aspects of American life. Their Arab heritage reflects a culture that is thousands of years old and includes 22 Arab countries as diverse as Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia and Palestine.

Selected Population Characteristics by Arab American Institute.

- * At least 3.5 million* Americans are of Arab descent

- * Arab Americans live in all 50 states, but two thirds are concentrated in 10 states; one third of the total live in California, New York, and Michigan followed by Florida, and Illinois.

- * About 94% of Arab Americans live in metropolitan areas. Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/NJ, Chicago and Washington, D.C., are the top five metropolitan areas of Arab American concentration

- * Lebanese Americans constitute a greater part of the total number of Arab Americans residing in most states, although in New Jersey, Egyptian Americans are the largest Arab group

- * Americans of Iraqi decent make up the majority of Arab Americans in Tennessee

- * While the largest Palestinian population is in California, the greatest concentration of Palestinians can be found in Illinois

- * There are almost as many Iraqis living in Michigan as there are living in California, even though California is 3.5% larger than Michigan

KEY FINDINGS:

The Arab American community is one of the fastest growing populations in the United States estimated at 1.5 million in the 2000 Census. The nation's increasing Arab American communities are in: California, Michigan, Florida, New York and Illinois.

In Illinois, specifically the Southwest suburbs the clustering of the Arab Americans are evident in BURBANK, OAK LAWN, CHICAGO RIDGE, JUSTICE, HICKORY HILLS, PALOS HILLS, and ORLAND PARK.

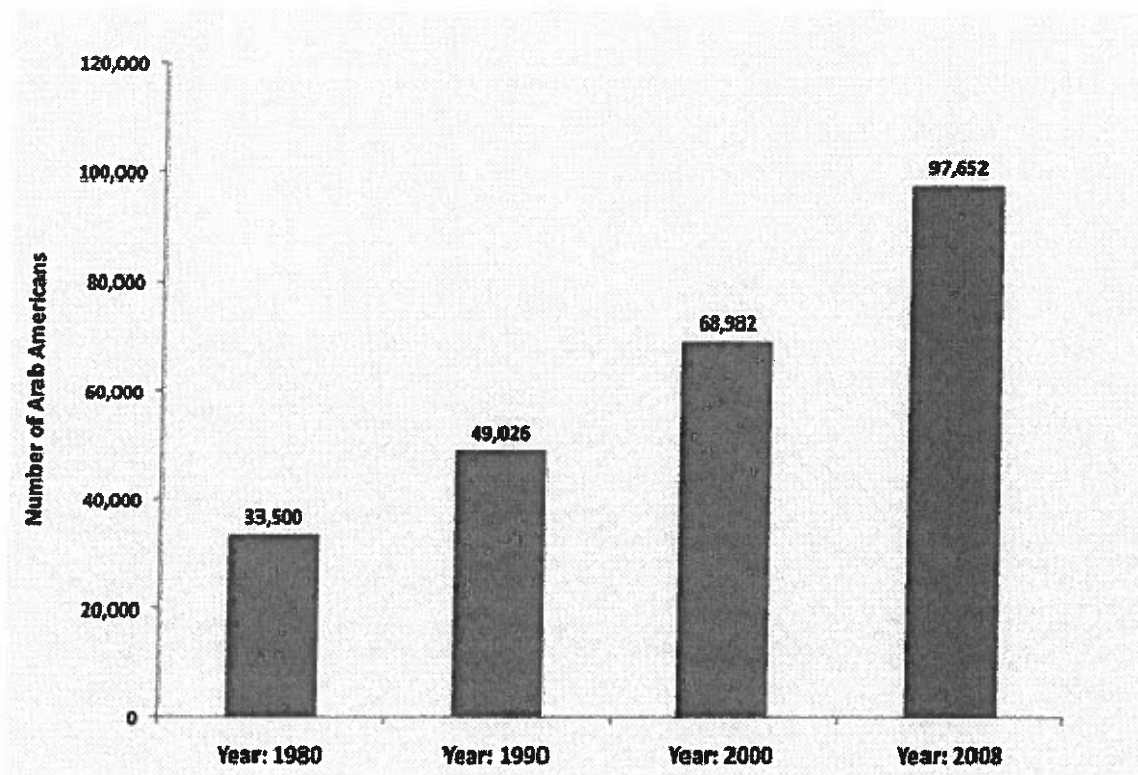
Despite the turnout in numbers many voters face difficulty in executing their votes, due to: language barriers, lack of knowledge of how the system works, and have come from Arab countries where they have never been given the freedom to vote .

The Arab American community is a 'community of interest' they share cultural, economic, political and social ties. These ties exist because of a common regional origin and language and dialect spoken. In addition, the cultural and social ties are also noted to the existence of various organizations and institutions within the Arab American community, one being a social service organization Arab American Family Services (AAFS) meeting the needs of its community members within the Southwest suburbs listed above.

Illinois

The population who identified an Arabic-speaking ancestry in the U.S. Census grew by more than 41% between 2000 and 2008. Since ancestry was first tabulated by the Census in 1980, the number of Illinois residents who claim an Arab or Chaldean/Assyrian background has almost tripled. *It is estimated that the statewide population, adjusting for underreporting,* is close to 220,000.*

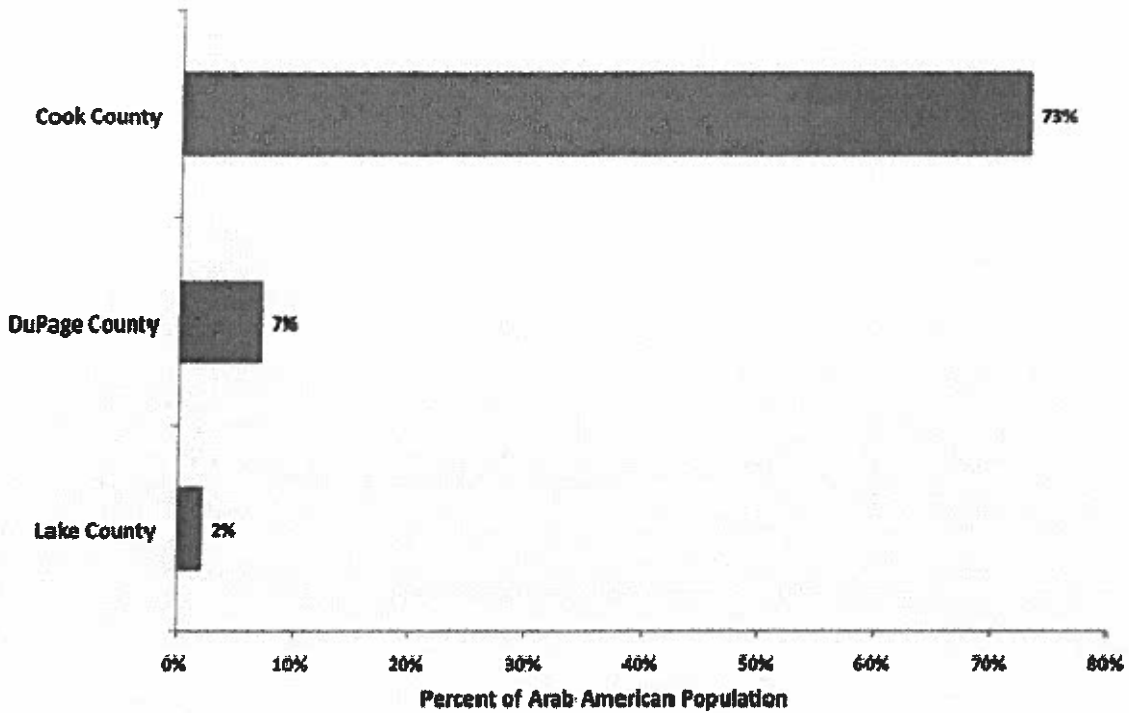
Arab American Population Growth



Surprisingly Lebanese and Syrian do not make up the largest percentages (14% and 4%, respectively). In Illinois, the older Lebanese and Syrian population has been surpassed by the large and growing second wave Chicago-based community which features significant percentages of Assyrians, Palestinians and Jordanians. The Chicago area is home to one of the largest Palestinian communities in the country, with many choosing to identify as Arab or Arabian.

Arab Americans can be found in 42 of the 57 counties counted in Illinois in the 2006-2008 ACS 3-year estimates. More than three quarters of those who claim an Arab or Assyrian ancestry reside in the metropolitan counties of Cook and DuPage.

Top Counties by Concentration of Arab Americans



Maximizing opportunities for individuals to become engaged also requires institutional changes. Included in this is the ability to have a meaningful and fair chance to elect officials who best represent the group's concerns, interests and priorities. In part, this requires not fragmenting an Arab American neighborhood into small and ineffective slivers that are spread over many electoral districts. Arab Americans are relatively new to this process. Community-based organizations and public-interest groups now have greater technical and political capacities to participate in redistricting, but there are new challenges. Perhaps the most important is determining whether a neighborhood is a "community of common interest."

**Arab American Family Services
Clients Served in 2010**

797	60453	OAKLAWN	3985
685	60455	BRIDGEVIEW	3425
528	60415	CHICAGO RIDGE	2640
461	60459	BURBANK	2305
278	60458	JUSTICE	1390
267	60457	HICKORY HILLS	1335
253	60477	TINLEY PARK	1265
209	60465	PALOS HILLS	1045
196	60462	ORLAND PARK	980
191	60482	WORTH	955

