



THE COUNCIL OF ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS OF GREATER CHICAGO

**Testimony to Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Ahlam Jbara, Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago
May 21, 2011**

The **Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC)** is a grassroots ethnically diverse member organization. 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.

We want to thank the committee and the leadership of Senator Raoul for ensuring that the Senate held public hearings after the release of draft maps as promised. The CIOGC has been working with United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations, the Asian American Institute and our leadership to define our neighborhood boundaries. We have provided district map proposals through our work with AAI and United Congress to show possible Arab, Asian, Latino, African American districts. We support the UCCRO Unity map which includes all our communities. We have submitted testimonies detailing the characteristics and socioeconomic concerns of our communities.

We have been working with AAI on possible Asian American Influence district, It is crucial that we don't further fragment the Asian American community. We have also presented a potential Arab House District in the Southwest suburbs, **Bridgeview, Burbank, Hickory Hills, Palos Hills, Chicago Ridge, and Worth**. Due to the census not including Arab demographics, Project Mobilize is submitting voter data on Arabs in these areas.

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.

We urge the Senate Redistricting Committee and the whole General Assembly to take another careful look at the fragmentation of the Arab, Latino, Asian, African American communities and be mindful of community of interest groups.

Thank you.

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Testimony to the Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Reema Ahmad, Project Mobilize
May 21, 2011

Good Afternoon Honorable Committee Members,

Thank you Chairman Raoul and fellow Committee Members for ensuring the public has an opportunity to weigh in on the drafted redistricting maps ahead of their finalization.

My name is Reema Ahmad and I am here as Executive Director of Project Mobilize, a non-profit political action organization based in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. I will be speaking on the growing Arab, Middle Eastern, and Asian electorate in the southwest suburbs of Chicago.

Project Mobilize seeks to develop the political potential in civically marginalized communities. In our current political climate, the diverse sub-communities of the Arab, Middle Eastern, and Asian American populations have been the focus. Within these communities are thousands of registered voters and even more U.S. citizens that have yet to fully assume their civic responsibilities. These are communities of healthcare professionals, business leaders, lawyers, social service providers and more. They are individuals who care about the communities in which they live and raise their families, and therefore deserve to more fully engage the political systems that govern us all.

The past decade has seen a significant growth in political participation from the Arab and Asian American communities of Chicagoland. Whereas in the past these communities might not have fully exercised their civic rights and responsibilities, the past seven years have seen more concerted efforts at registering voters among the Arab and Asian American communities and turning them out to vote in increasing numbers. These efforts have been coordinated through local organizations such as the Mosque Foundation, AAFS, CIOGC, CAIR-Chicago, IMAN, Project Mobilize, and others.

As these communities have become more and more engaged in the political process they have come to represent a growing portion of the voting electorate both locally and state-wide. This growth comes with increased responsibilities on the part of the individual communities as well as the legislators that seek to accurately represent the concerns and needs of their constituents.

Project Mobilize has compiled information on the Arab, Middle Eastern, and Asian American electorate through researching voting records released by local election authorities. The following table shows a portion of the breakdown of these voters by municipality.

MUNICIPALITY	ARAB VOTERS	TOTAL VOTERS	PERCENT OF ARAB VOTERS
Bridgeview	889	7358	12.08%
Burbank	719	13741	5.23%
Chicago Ridge	1350	6458	20.90%
Hickory Hills	325	7204	4.51%

It should be noted that these figures continue to increase as Project Mobilize and other community organizations continue to identify more community members who are eligible to vote and educate these Communities of Interest on civic rights and responsibilities on a year-round basis.

As previous testimonies from representatives of CIOGC and Arab American Family Services detail, the Arab, Middle Eastern, and Asian American communities do indeed have needs that must be

serviced by their representative officials. These needs and the increase in the voting population from the Arab and Asian American communities necessitate greater representation by local elected officials, forming the foundation for maintaining the integrity of concentrations of these communities in single legislative districts.

In order to maximize the political potential of these communities, there must be a district that consolidates the areas of concentration for these communities of interest into one district. To ensure a voice for every voter, particularly historically marginalized ones, this district should include the communities of Bridgeview, Burbank, Chicago Ridge, Hickory Hills, and Justice.

In our ever diversifying cities and state, the contributions, needs, and concerns of growing Communities of Interest can no longer go unrepresented. On behalf of Project Mobilize and the thousands of Arab and Asian American voters we mobilize, I ask that you consider these communities and the potential they have to contribute positively to each of our livelihoods through greater participation in local and statewide government as you determine the new legislative districts of Illinois.

I welcome any questions or comments that pertain to the information presented. Thank you for your time and attention.

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