



**TESTIMONY BY THE ASIAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE
BEFORE THE ILLINOIS SENATE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE
MARCH 28, 2011**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Asian American Institute (also called 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 at this stage in redistricting and also after draft maps are released but before they are voted on.

AAI is a pan-Asian, non-profit, non-partisan organization located in Chicago, Illinois whose mission is to empower the Asian American community through advocacy, research, education, and coalition-building. AAI's programs include legal advocacy, community organizing, and leadership development. AAI is a member of the national Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, whose other members include Asian American Justice Center in Washington, D.C., Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, and Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles.

2011 redistricting will critically affect people's day-to-day lives because redistricting helps determine who can vote, who can run for office, and who can win in a given district. When minorities are distributed fairly throughout districts, they have a fair chance to influence the outcome of elections so that representatives will be responsive to their needs. But historically in Illinois, minorities' voting rights have been diluted by unfair and illegal practices such as cracking or packing. For many years, AAI has been working with the Asian American community at large to unite our neighborhoods into



single districts and prevent further vote dilution as a result of redistricting. We work in coalition with other minority groups and reform groups, including Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), Illinois Campaign for Accountable Redistricting/Draw the Line Illinois (ICAR), and United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations (UCCRO).

In coalition with concerned community leaders, AAI aims to make a positive impact on the redistricting process. In today's testimony, we describe the legal protections of Asian American voting rights, current demographics of Asian Americans in Illinois, details about one of the areas of concern – the Greater West Ridge area of Chicago and nearby suburbs, and the need for transparency throughout the redistricting process.

II. LEGAL PROTECTIONS OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTING RIGHTS

Under federal and state law, Asian Americans have the right to have votes that count. Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act prohibits any voting practice or procedure that results in the denial or abridgement of a person's right to vote based on race, color, or minority language status.¹ Specifically, the federal Voting Rights Act prohibits laws or practices that deny minority voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect candidates of their choice.²

The recently enacted Illinois Voting Rights Act provides additional protections for racial and language minorities.³ In addition to reiterating the federal Voting Rights Act, the new law also requires that the Illinois General Assembly draw "crossover districts," where the minority is potentially large enough to elect the candidate of its

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 1973; *Thornburg v. Gingles*, 478 U.S. 30 (1986).

² *Id.*

³ ILL. PUBLIC ACT 096-1541 (2011).



choice with help from voters outside the minority; “coalition districts,” where more than one minority group could form a coalition to elect the candidate of their choice; and “influence districts,” where a minority can influence an election outcome even if its preferred candidate cannot be elected.

The Asian American community is deeply concerned about having an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and the ability to elect representatives of our choice. During hearings about redistricting reform in 2009 and 2010, AAI testified repeatedly about the rising numbers of residents and the corresponding fragmentation in the Greater Chinatown and Greater West Ridge neighborhoods in Chicago, as well as other compact communities in Illinois whose members have common ground in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social concerns. When trying to voice these concerns, neighborhood residents often have to go to two, three, or more legislators, who might not all agree with each other or who do not take Asian Americans seriously because the current district lines dilute the community’s vote. Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, Hamdard Center, South Asian Americans, Korean Americans, and other community leaders and organizations are testifying 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.

During 2011 redistricting, the Illinois General Assembly must (1) protect the functional opportunity of racial and language minorities to elect the candidates of their choice; (2) guard against packing, cracking, and other forms of unfair vote dilution; and (3) keep cohesive communities of interest united when drawing district lines by respecting boundaries defined by the communities themselves. AAI and its allies plan to provide such community boundaries soon; we are in the process of obtaining input from community leaders and organizations in these areas, as it is important for us to consult the people who live, work, and serve residents in those areas. Today, we present you with updated Census and demographic information that demonstrates that Asian Americans



are a rapidly growing population whose voting rights must be respected during 2011 redistricting.

III. OVERVIEW OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN ILLINOIS

Since 2000, the Asian American population in Illinois has grown by 39%⁴, and we have been one of the fastest-growing populations in the state, while most other races have seen an overall decline. Asian Americans represent almost 5% of the state's population⁵, and in certain areas, the concentration is much higher. In areas such as Greater Chinatown, Greater West Ridge (including portions of West Ridge, Devon Avenue, West Rogers Park, North Park, Albany Park, and other neighborhoods), and portions of suburban Cook County, Asian Americans make up over 25% of the population; in DuPage County, Asians are 10% of the population. Twelve counties in Illinois experienced 100% or more Asian population growth since 2000.⁶ Even though Chicago's population decreased by nearly 7% since 2000, its Asian population increased by approximately 17%.⁷ And as discussed further below in Section IV, certain geographic areas of concern to our community, Asian populations have grown significantly even though the overall population in those areas went down.

Locally and nationally, Asian and Latino populations have grown considerably, in part because of relatively higher levels of immigration.⁸ Nationwide, between 2000 and 2010, the population of those who identify as Asian alone grew faster than any other

⁴ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000 & CENSUS 2010. In 2000, the number of people in Illinois who were Asian alone was 423,603. In 2010, this number increased to 586,934, a 39% increase. These figures were calculated using totals of people who selected a single race category of Asian. Additional data and citations are available from AAI upon request. In the coming months, AAI will be providing more analysis and details as additional Census figures continue to be released.

⁵ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010. In 2010, the number of people in Illinois who were Asian alone was 586,934 out of a total population of 12,830,632, which represents 5% of the population.

⁶ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000 & CENSUS 2010. Of these twelve counties, Cook, DuPage, and Lake Counties had the highest total Asian American population in 2000, and they continue to do so in 2010.

⁷ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

⁸ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *2010 Census Shows America's Diversity: Hispanic and Asian Populations Grew Fastest During Decade* (Mar. 24, 2011) (press release).



major race group.⁹ Newly naturalized Americans, specifically Asians and Latinos, make up an increasingly large portion of the electorate – nationwide and in Illinois.¹⁰

AAI and its many community partners have worked to increase the civic engagement of Asian Americans in the Chicago area through projects such as Census outreach, non-partisan voter education and voter turnout, and redistricting advocacy. AAI's community partners include ethnic-specific and neighborhood-specific organizations throughout the Chicago area, and we collaborate on civic engagement efforts with groups such as Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment, Apna Ghar, Cambodian Association of Illinois, Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, Chinese American Service League, Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, Hamdard Center, Indo-American Center, Muslim Women's Resource Center, Korean American Community Services, Korean American Resource and Cultural Center, Korean American Women in Need, Lao American Organization of Elgin, Metro Asian Family Services, Pui Tak Center, South Asian American Policy and Research Institute, Southeast Asia Center, Vietnamese Association of Illinois, and Vietnamese Senior Association of Chicago.

Asian Americans are now nearly 5% of the state's population¹¹, and Asian Americans have assumed a growing role as leaders in the state's business, educational, and community organizations, but an Asian American has still never been elected to the Illinois General Assembly or any statewide office. Over 100 Asian Americans in Cook and DuPage Counties have run for elected office, including federal, state, and local positions, with the majority of these candidates running for office in the past 10 years.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Rob Paral & Assocs., *The New American Electorate: The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children*, at 4 (Oct. 2008), available at <http://immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/NewCitizenVotersWEBversion.pdf>; Rob Paral & Assocs., *Supplement to The New American Electorate: The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children*, at 5 (Oct. 2008), available at <http://robparal.com/downloads/NewAmericansSupplementEthnicity.pdf>.

¹¹ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.



Yet, since 2000, over 75% of these Asian American candidates have lost, and *all* Asian American candidates for the Illinois General Assembly or statewide offices have lost.

Contributing to the problem of Asian Americans not having the full and fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, redistricting in Illinois has fragmented Asian American neighborhoods and diluted the community's vote. After the 2000 Census, *five* Illinois Senate districts were over 10% Asian American¹²; yet, after the lines were redrawn in 2001, only *two* Senate districts were over 10% Asian American¹³. *Based on the current district lines and recently released 2010 Census data, 16 House districts and 10 Senate Districts are over 10% Asian American.*¹⁴ Similarly, at the Congressional level, four Congressional districts were over 7% Asian American after the 2000 Census, but after 2001 redistricting, only two districts remained over 7%.¹⁵ The most recent Census shows that there are now five districts that are over 7%. The Asian American population in the northwest suburbs is booming, and it is now over 12% of the population there.¹⁶ For example, in Hoffman Estates, Asian Americans make up 22.7% of the population, and in Schaumburg, Asian Americans make up 19.8% of the population. There are similarly large Asian American communities in South Barrington, Streamwood, Hanover Park, Buffalo Grove, and other places in close proximity. Despite this fact, the Asian American community in these areas are divided into at least three congressional districts – Congressional Districts 6, 8, and 10 – thus diluting their electoral strength. Clearly, Asian Americans are an important stakeholder in this year's redistricting process at the state and Congressional levels.

¹² Redistricting Website of Illinois Speaker of the House, *available at* <http://clients.ecampaigning.com/ilr/data/2ksenate.htm> (citing 2000 U.S. Census Data by Illinois Senate District).

¹³ Redistricting Website of Illinois Speaker of the House, *available at* http://clients.ecampaigning.com/ilr/data/currieii_house.htm (citing Currie II (as Amended by Bilandic Amendment) House Districts – Total Population).

¹⁴ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Asian Population Booming in Suburbs*, DAILY HERALD (Mar. 6, 2011), *available at* <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20110306/news/703069929>.



IV. GREATER WEST RIDGE AND OTHER NEARBY ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

In addition to the Greater Chinatown area in Chicago, there are several other compact Asian American communities whose residents have common ground in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social concerns and who should be kept together in single districts during redistricting. One example is the Greater West Ridge area (including portions of West Ridge, Devon Avenue, West Rogers Park, North Park, Albany Park, and other Chicago neighborhoods) and nearby portions of suburban Cook County, including Skokie and Morton Grove. As can be seen on map attached to this testimony (“Map”), 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.

AAI is in the process of obtaining input from community leaders and organizations in these areas, as well as analyzing data about these areas, as it is important for us to consult the people who live, work, and serve community members in those areas. We intend to present maps in the near future that set forth boundaries of community areas that should be kept within single districts during the redistricting process.

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 between 2000 and 2010 (with the exception of Illinois House District 17, whose population essentially stayed the same).¹⁷ However, each of these same areas experienced significant growth of Asian population, ranging from 10% to 32% growth.¹⁸ This demographic trend points to the need to protect the voting rights of these Asian Americans and consider their input when redrawing these lines.

¹⁷ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

¹⁸ *Id.*



The residents in the areas represented on the Map have common ground not just in terms of race, but also in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social issues.¹⁹ Most of the Asian Americans in this area are Asian Indian, Korean, or Filipino.²⁰ There are also clusters of Pakistani, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian American residents in these areas.²¹ Languages spoken in the area include. Languages spoken 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 this particular area 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.²² People in this area also have other unique concerns that unite them, including concerns about small, minority-owned businesses; commercial corridors and business development; cultural diversity and demographic change; residential development and public spaces; government services; crime; and education.²³ This area is a gateway for many immigrants and new citizens who are in the process of adjusting to the United States.

Just as one example, growing numbers of Asian American children and families in these areas have unique concerns that need to be addressed effectively by the elected officials who represent them. The Village of Skokie has reported that approximately

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

²¹ *Id.*

²² 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.

²³ *Id.*



56% of their public school students speak a language other than English at home, and of these languages, the largest categories are Urdu or Spanish (between 2004 and 2010, Urdu and Spanish have gone back and forth as the first and second top languages spoken at home by Skokie students, other than English).²⁴ Significant numbers of Skokie students also speak other Asian languages at home, including Tagalog, Korean, Gujarati, Arabic, Malayalam, Vietnamese, and Cantonese.²⁵ In the areas of Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles, and Lincolnwood, there are 11 school districts where Asians make up over 25% of the enrollment.²⁶ In two of these 11 school districts, Asian enrollment is higher than the enrollment of any other race.²⁷ In nearly all of these 11 school districts, over 20% of the school's students have limited English proficiency.²⁸

V. NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY AND CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC INPUT

In order for there to be meaningful transparency and consideration of public input during redistricting, the General Assembly should (1) hold public hearings *after* maps are drafted but *before* they are finalized; (2) make draft maps available for review by community groups as soon as possible, with reasonable time for them to review the proposals; and (3) give serious consideration to maps and comments from the public, especially community groups who are familiar with the needs of the neighborhoods at stake. Those drawing the maps cannot legitimately keep in mind the needs of communities unless they hear first-hand from the public both before and after the map-drawing process begins. The public must also have prompt access to redistricting data, draft maps, and hearing transcripts and recordings, in order to give useful input on where district lines should be drawn. Asian Americans gave input during the 2001 redistricting process, but our communities were still further splintered, which points to the need for greater consideration of public input.

²⁴ VILL. OF SKOKIE, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ ILL. STATE BD. OF ED. SCHOOL REPORT CARDS (2010); U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

²⁷ *Id.*

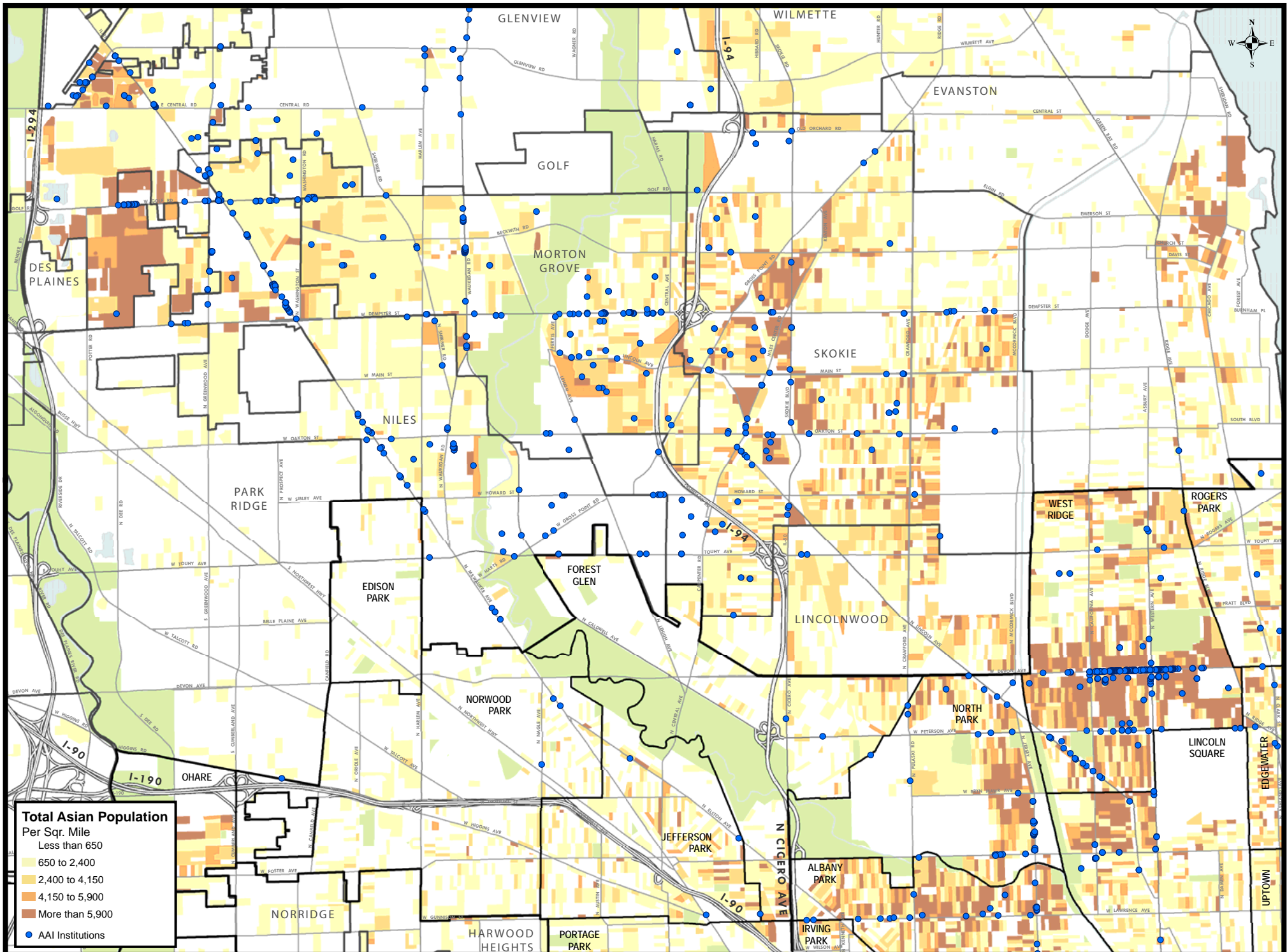
²⁸ *Id.*



VI. CONCLUSION

Asian American Institute urges the Committee and other members of the General Assembly to remain mindful of the rights of Asian Americans and other minority communities in Illinois. The Asian American community has faced egregious vote dilution a result of past redistricting. We urge you to ensure that this unfortunate history is not repeated. Many of our community members and allies are here today to express that Asian Americans' input should be meaningfully considered during the redistricting process. AAI would be glad to provide additional information or analysis upon request.

Areas of Asian Population & Asian Institutions: 2010



Total Asian Population
Per Sq. Mile

- Less than 650
- 650 to 2,400
- 2,400 to 4,150
- 4,150 to 5,900
- More than 5,900

● AAI Institutions

Source: Asian American Institute

0 0.375 0.75 1.5 Miles

Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee

March 28 2011

Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Kiran Siddiqui and currently I am the Executive Director of Hamdard Center for Health and Human services, a non for profit specializing in providing social and primary care services to the South Asian population in the Rogers Park, Edgewater, Skokie and other outlying areas. I was also the program director of Apna Ghar, the only South Asian domestic violence shelter in Cook County, for 5 years. I have been providing social services to the South Asian community for the past 12 years, which have included case management, counseling and advocacy. For eleven years, I was a resident of Skokie, and I have been a resident of Morton Grove for the last ten years.

I am deeply involved in the south Asian community of Morton Grove and I have seen the growth of the immigrant and south Asian community increase dramatically. As background, when I say "south Asian," I am referring to a subgroup within Asian Americans that includes people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and Bhutanese descent. Even though we come from different countries, there are many cultural and social similarities between our groups.

There are more and more businesses in my area owned and operated by South Asians, like grocery stores, salons and daycares. In Morton Grove, my daughter attends the Muslim Education Center which has a large percentage of South Asian students enrolled and its Sunday school also has a large percentage of South Asian students enrolled. The Village of Skokie has reported that approximately 56% of public school students speak a language other than English at home, and of these languages, the largest categories are Urdu or Spanish (between 2004 and 2010, Urdu and Spanish have gone back and forth as the first and second top languages spoken at home by Skokie students, other than English). Niles West High school that serves Skokie, Niles and parts of Morton Grove has an enrollment of approximately 2500 students and Asians make up the second highest race enrolled. And

according to 2010 data released by the Illinois State Board of Education, in the areas of Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles, and Lincolnwood, there are at least 10 school districts where Asians make up over 25% of the enrollment. This shows that many students and families in these areas have unique concerns that need to be addressed effectively by the elected officials who represent them.

Members of the committee, I am invested in this community. I have been living in this community for the last 21 years and I have seen the growth of the south Asian population in Morton Grove, Niles and Skokie. We have built a mosque that serves over 500 people and nearly 85% of them are South Asian. And many of these South Asian members come to Hamdard Center for services as we are the closest multi comprehensive social service agency. My staff members reflect the community and speak 6 different south Asian languages (including Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujrati, Telegu, and Malaylam) to accommodate clients' many complex needs. Hamdard has a domestic violence shelter that is sensitive to the needs of South Asian victims of domestic violence; just as one example, we can be sensitive to Muslim clients by providing them with Halal meat. Because of our unique understanding and the comfort we can provide, many south Asian victims have to stay with us longer thereby forcing us to turn away an average of over 200 women and children each year. Hamdard Center is a beacon of services for many immigrants and refugees and we serve over 2000 clients, in spite of state budget cuts, which has been an average of 10% to my agency for the last 2 years.

Hamdard Center is a sister agency to other Asian and South Asian agencies like Indo-American Center, Asian American Institute, Apna Ghar, Metropolitan Asian Family Services, Muslim Women Resource Center, and Korean American Women in Need (KAN-WIN), and we share many of the same concerns. We have collaborated on many projects including the US Census 2010 outreach, when 4 of the agencies mentioned above were Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) for the Census. This example shows you the cohesiveness of the partnership between the many Asian and South Asian institutions in Cook County. Our concern is that we all serve Asian and South Asian clients from Skokie,

Niles and Morton Grove, yet there is a stark lack of Asian or South Asian elected officials serving this growing community. According to Census 2010, Illinois' Asian population was the fastest growing in the state, swelling in the collar counties. Yet there is not even one publicly elected state official that reflects this dramatic shift. Currently myself and my sister agencies would agree with me that we have to go to several different elected officials to get our problems addressed which our clients bring to us. This is a huge hindrance to us as well as our clients, and we want this committee to be fair when reviewing district lines. District lines have a real impact on whether we as minorities can participate in government and make a positive difference in our communities. It is important that my community be grouped together so that we can elect candidates of our choice who can be responsive to our needs. Our community is united not just by race but also by many other socioeconomic factors that we have in common, such as income and access to services.

As a South Asian who has worked for the South Asian population for the last 12 years and as a South Asian who has lived in Skokie/Morton Grove for the last 21 years, I am heavily invested in the process of redistricting and would like to appeal to the members to keep this process transparent. We as Asian Americans want to be treated fairly during the redistricting process. Hamdard Center is working with AAI to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will give those to you soon.

Thank you for your time.

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March 28, 2011 Testimony to Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee

I am Sharda Thapa testifying as a member of the Nepali-American community, one of the groups within the Asian American community. I have lived in Chicago for 34 years, 18 of them in the West Rogers Park neighborhood, which is also sometimes called the West Ridge neighborhood. I am a self-employed freelance business consultant who has been active in my community and in Asian-American activities since 1981, mainly in the areas of founding, growing and maintaining social and cultural organizations. Recently, I have become active in civic and political affairs, especially in helping Asian-Americans gain fair representation in elective government and the ability to elect candidates of our choice - an area we have been lacking in.

The Nepali-American community in Chicagoland, including immigrants from Nepal as well as people of Nepali descent, has grown from less than 100 in 1980 to nearly 10,000 now and more than a quarter of them are estimated to reside in the north-northwest section of Chicago and the nearby suburbs like Skokie and Niles. Over time, the population has tended to shift gradually, as people established themselves, from the city to the close-in suburbs and then farther out. The number of immigrants is being augmented by the recent resettlement in the northern part of Chicago of substantial numbers of Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan, who are Nepali ethnics driven out in the 1980s, and their families. This is the most notable concentration of the community in the entire area and the phenomenon is closely linked to the growth of the Devon area corridor as a South Asian hub, comprising people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali descent. As a long-time West Rogers Park resident, I have observed its growing importance to this community because of its concentration of social and cultural institutions, family-owned businesses and immigrant residents. These effective and efficient means of providing much-needed services can only be enhanced if the contiguity is maintained and the institutions receive both credit and funding for providing these services.

Since Nepali-Americans are a relatively new immigrant group, there are no established social service institutions and support organizations targeted to this group. As a result, many in our community who need social services or other resources rely on agencies established with other South Asians or Asians in mind. This is expected to continue.

Nepali-Americans originally arrived here independently as professionals or students or associated with Indian emigrant entrepreneurs, usually as employees. Many of these Nepalis have been helped up by earlier Indian and Pakistani immigrants. There is no travel, work or residency restrictions between India and Nepal and some of these ties continued into the US. The religious, cultural, food and living styles of Nepal are very analogous to India and Tibet, more the former. It is therefore fair to say that all South Asian immigrants would like to remain together and benefit from being within one district or a few districts, rather than being split up into many districts. We could then elect candidates of our choice responsive to our unique needs.

There is cohesiveness within the Asian American community at large. We come from different countries, but we share many cultural and social similarities. For that reason, Asian American Institute

has sought the input of the South Asian community and West Rogers Park community in various projects relating to civic engagement like Census outreach, voter education, and redistricting advocacy.

Nepali-Americans will generally endorse boundaries drawn to respect our community and the other South Asian communities. We are working with AAI to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will give those to you soon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I urge you to give meaningful consideration to the Asian American community's input and to treat our community fairly during the redistricting process.

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March 28, 2011 Testimony to Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee

Harendra Mangrola, Vice President, Sumit Construction

My name is Harendra Mangrola, and I am an active member of the Indian American community, especially in the northwestern suburbs, where I make my home. I have lived in Illinois for 24 years, 21 years of them in Skokie. I am the Vice President at Sumit Construction Co., Inc., which is a MBE General Contractor working in Illinois.

Also I am President of Gayatri Gyan Mandir, a not profit religious and cultural organization, located in Niles and Itasca.

As an Indian American, I know that I share many commonalities and concerns with other Asian Americans. As a member of the Association of Asian Construction Enterprises, I advocated for the re-inclusion of Asian Americans in Cook County and Chicago's affirmative action programs for construction. In 2004, Sumit Construction Co., Inc. testified about the discrimination that Asian Americans still face in this industry. That experience made it clear that our community is at a disadvantage when there is no Asian American with a seat at the table.

Through my community involvement, I have work with Asian Americans in the Skokie, Morton Grove and Niles area which are represented by 5 House districts. As we have tried to build relationships with legislators, we have found some legislators more responsive than others. Representative Lou Lang's district has the largest Asian American population at 24%. Not surprisingly, he has been more responsive to our issues than others. In order to gain better representation and accountability from our legislators, I urge the committee to draw our community into fewer districts, especially those who have receptive legislators, like Representatives Lang and Daniel Biss.

Chicago's Chinatown is a well-known example of how Asian Americans have been fractured, but there are other examples well-known to our community. As Kyle Hillman points out the fracturing of the Indian and Pakistani that he calls the "Devon Desi Corridor" in his March 24, 2011 Huffington Post article (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kyle-hillman/illinois-redistricting-chinatown_b_839901.html).

Finally, just as this Redistricting Commission attempts to rectify problems with the state map such as with the "Devon Desi Corridor", it should also fix congressional districts, where Asian Americans could express their political voice more effectively if we were not divided among several districts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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Testimony to Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Rabya Khan, Community Member
March 28, 2011

Good afternoon Chairman Raoul and Senators. Thank you for holding this hearing and giving us the opportunity to speak today. My name is Rabya Khan and I am a community activist. I am here today on behalf of the Asian American Institute and the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago.

There is a growing Muslim and Asian population in Illinois. The Muslim American community contains significant percentages of minorities from the Arab-American, African-American, Latino American and Asian-American populations.

There is cohesiveness within the Asian American community at large. We come from different countries and religious backgrounds, but we share many cultural and social similarities. As you heard earlier, the Asian American Institute is testifying today about the growing population of Asians in the Gerter West Ridge area of Chicago, as well as the growing Asian population in nearby suburbs such as Skokie and Morton Grove. It is important and imperative that our voice and vote not be diluted.

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 such as mosques, temples and churches are 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 districts are divided to cut out 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 already have established relationships with State Senators and Representatives near the Devon community in Chicago. They understand our needs for protecting undocumented students, language access to social services, citizenship classes, English class, etc. We have only begun to organize ourselves and increase our involvement with the electoral process. I hope our testimony today and our years of activism and organizing is taken into account by this committee in the redistricting process. Thank you.