



# CHINESE AMERICAN SERVICE LEAGUE, Inc.

A Not-For-Profit Organization

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## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ILLINOIS SENATE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE

March 28, 2011, Chicago, IL

Submitted by:

Bernie Wong, President

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Good Afternoon. My name is Bernie Wong. I am the President of the Chinese American Service League (CASL), a social service organization that has been serving the Chinese community in Chicago for over 30 years. I would like to thank the committee for holding these important hearings to gather community input for the redistricting process. CASL is also part of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), which has been working on the redistricting issue and community empowerment in general for over a decade.

I live and work in the Greater Chinatown Community Area. I raised my family in the Bridgeport neighborhood and I have been a member of St. Therese Church for several decades. My organization, the Chinese American Service League, founded in 1978, is the largest and most comprehensive social service agency in the Midwest dedicated to serving the needs of Chinese Americans. Housed in the Kam L. Liu Building, with over 300 multilingual and multicultural professional and support staff, CASL's \$11.4 million budget supports programming that mainly serves new immigrants who often do not have formal education, possess few transferable job skills, and know little of their newly adopted community. Since many of these individuals do not speak English and sometimes have no family or friends in the area, CASL often becomes an instant family, friend, and teacher to our clients. With our support, CASL clients become thriving residents and citizens of the greater Chicago community, making valuable contributions in their own right as independent, productive members of society. In the words of one of those clients, "We had nothing but our dreams. The Chinese American Service League helped us realize them."

CASL's programs—child education and development, employment services, counseling and social service, health, elderly services, housing and financial literacy services, and more—reach more than 17,000 clients annually. Our clients live primarily in the Chinatown-Armour Square, Bridgeport, McKinley Park and Brighton Park areas of Chicago, although we have also included a portion of the South Loop in our Community Area because there is a significant number of Chinese residents who are our clients living at The Oaks Dearborn Park Elderly Homes.

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The attached map showing the location of our staff, clients, and part-time homemakers along with the Pui Tak Center's ESL students is a compelling document that is a strong argument for keeping this area, which we have designated the Greater Chinatown Community Area, as part of a single district in the redistricting process.

While CASL is currently located in the Illinois 5<sup>th</sup> House District, CASL clients are now spread over a total of five state representative districts: the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup>. The case is the same with other service organizations in the community including Pui Tak Center, which enrolls almost 1000 ESL students in its classes every semester. Henry Booth House, a community-based social service agency on the Eastern edge of the Community Area, estimates that its clientele is currently 60% Asian. All of these organizations receive some state funding, so the outcome of state redistricting will undeniably have an impact on how well we are able to serve our clients and community.

Additional community institutions include numerous Family Associations scattered throughout the neighborhood; the Chinese Community Center; the Chinese American Civic Council; the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce; and Ling Shen Ching Tze Buddhist Temple on 31<sup>st</sup> and Morgan. Mercy Hospital on 26<sup>th</sup> and Michigan is also an important community institution which has taken quite a few positive measures to recognize the increasing numbers of Chinese patients it serves. Signs are bilingual in English and Chinese as are many of its doctors, nurses and other staff.

The community is also bound together by a wide range small, family-owned businesses, including restaurants, noodle companies, herbal shops, print and sign shops, auto body and repair shops. No longer limited to the Chinatown Commercial district along Wentworth Avenue or in the Chinatown Square Mall, these businesses are well-distributed throughout the community area. There also are many new areas burgeoning with the entrepreneurial spirit of our community: along Halsted, 31<sup>st</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> streets in Bridgeport, and all along the Archer Avenue corridor into McKinley Park and Brighton Park. On 35<sup>th</sup> Street between Morgan and Aberdeen, the internationally acclaimed artists from China, the Zhou Brothers, have opened a complex of galleries, artists' lofts and a café. The Zhou Brothers, by the way, are strong supporters of CASL's work and have donated a number of valuable artworks toward our fundraising efforts.

Within this Greater Chinatown Community Area, community members can obtain a range of ethnic goods and services not available elsewhere in the vicinity. Limited English speakers can easily converse and conduct business transactions with shopkeepers and service providers in their native Chinese dialects.

The new generation of Chinese Americans who grow up fluent in English is also well served by educational institutions in the area. Numerous Chicago Public Schools and some private schools throughout the area have Chinese American student populations ranging from 10% to 92%. There is also a growing number

of tutoring centers, after school program, and martial arts studios that cater to the young people of this community.

The Greater Chinatown Community Area is a vibrant and cohesive community. Its interests are not served by being split into multiple districts as it is currently. I ask that the committee please respect our request to be mapped into a single district. Thank you.



# Community Institutions

- Community Organizations
- Library
- Banks
- Landmark
- Schools
- Senior Housing
- Place of Worship
- + Hospital
- Health Resources
- Businesses
- CBCAC Target Area
- Neighborhoods

