

Testimony to Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Rabya Khan, Community Member
[Email: rkhan44@gmail.com; Cell: (630) 437-0069]

March 28, 2011

I. Personal and Community Description:

- Muslim, South Asian
- Grew up in Western suburbs, and have resided in City for last 10 years. Attended college in city, and have lived in Illinois my entire life.
- Organizations work and volunteer with: Asian American Institute (AAI), Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC), the South Asian Progressive Action Collective (SAPAC), Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), and Apna Ghar, Inc.
- Through my activism with afore mentioned organizations, I have familiarity and knowledge of common concerns and issues affecting the Muslim and Asian communities in Chicago.

II. Uniqueness of Community:

There is a growing Muslim and Asian population in Illinois. The Muslim community contains a significant percentage of Asians. 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. For that reason, AAI and other pan-Asian efforts seek input of my ethnic and religious community during various projects relating to civic engagement, including Census outreach, voter education, and redistricting advocacy.

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. 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 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 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. We already have established relationships with State Senators and Representatives near the Devon community in Chicago. They understand our needs for protecting undocumented students (Dream Act), language access to social services, citizenship classes, English classes, 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.