

# **Public Testimony to the Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee**

**Prepared by Valerie F. Leonard,  
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Good afternoon. My name is Valerie Leonard. I am a resident of North Lawndale and Co-Founder of the Lawndale Alliance. The North Lawndale community is located approximately 3 miles west of the Chicago Downtown. As of 2005, the racial composition was 93.85% African American, 5.27% Hispanic, 3.19% White, .2% Asian, and 3.58% of some other race. The community continues to struggle with issues of high rates of poverty and unemployment, blighted commercial districts, high crime, poor performing schools, high mortgage foreclosure rates, lack of access to decent and affordable housing, and limited access to health care.

North Lawndale covers approximately 50% of the land mass in Representative District 9, and 25% of Senate District 5. Approximately 80% of North Lawndale's land mass is in the 24<sup>th</sup> Ward, and the 24<sup>th</sup> Ward accounts for approximately 50% of Representative District 9's weighted vote, and 25% of the weighted vote for Senate District 5. North Lawndale is in the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. The voters of Representative District 9 tend to vote Democratic.

The Lawndale Alliance is a neighborhood association of local residents who come together on an ad hoc basis to address issues of concern to the community through grassroots community organizing, advocacy and community outreach. We hold annual TIF town hall meetings series on a number of topics, including status reports on the financial and programmatic performance of every TIF that impacts North Lawndale; the performance of North Lawndale schools; the pros and cons of hosting Olympic venue in North Lawndale; and a status report on the impact of the mortgage foreclosure crisis and the level of Neighborhood Stabilization Program funding the community received to put abandoned foreclosed properties back on the property tax rolls as affordable housing units. We are currently working with State Representative Arthur Turner, II and a coalition consisting of the Illinois Campaign for Accountable Redistricting (ICAR), the Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization, Empowered Citizens of North Lawndale and the North Lawndale Community News to conduct a 3-part voter education series focusing on the States' redistricting process. It is our hope to develop a series of remapping recommendations shortly after the series ends on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

## Concerns

### Reduction in Percentage of African Americans Represented in 5<sup>th</sup> Senate District

During a recent public meeting in which Democratic Committeemen from the North and West Sides selected former Senator Rickey Hendon's replacement, Secretary of State Jesse White indicated that Illinois Senate District 5 will become more diverse after the redistricting process. The new district is expected to include more whites and Latinos as a percentage of the Illinois 5th Senatorial District's total population. Secretary White mentioned that, currently, the Illinois Senate District 5 is 55% African American.

An examination of 2010 Census data indicated that in 2000, Senate District 5 had a total of 210,497 people, with 105,248 residing in Representative District 9 and 105,249 residing in Representative District 10. In 2010, Representative District 9 grew to 112,861, while Representative District 10's population decreased to 95,447. The total decrease for Senate District 5 was only 1%, which should not require gerrymandering to the point of diluting the African American percentage beyond the current 55%. The 2010 Census indicates that Illinois population was 12,830,632 in 2010. This would suggest that each new representative district would have 108,734 people. This would mean that Representative District 9's boundaries could be drawn to reduce its population by 4,127 people and Representative District 10's boundaries should be drawn to increase its boundaries by 13,287 people, and the Senate District 5 boundaries should be drawn to increase its total population by 9,160. I respectfully request that the Senate Redistricting Committee consider redrawing the boundaries such that the overage from Representative District 9 be applied to District 10, and the remaining 9,160 come from other Representative Districts, with an eye towards maintaining a district that is 55% African American.

	2000	2010	Change from 2000-2010	% Change from 2000-2010	Target District Population	Overage/ Shortage
Representative District 9	105,248	112,861	7,613	7.2%	108,734	4,127
Representative District 10	105,249	95,447	(9,802)	-9.3%	108,734	(13,287)
<b>Senate District 5 (Total)</b>	<b>210,497</b>	<b>208,308</b>	<b>(2,189)</b>	<b>-1.04%</b>	<b>217,468</b>	<b>(9,160)</b>

### Treatment of Prisoners in Census Count

Under current law, incarcerated persons are not counted in the Census numbers of the community from which they originate, but in the populations of the towns in which they are incarcerated. As a result, the Census numbers in Chicago for African Americans is significantly undercounted, while the numbers in some Downstate communities is inflated by over 95%. On top of that, representatives from the districts in which the prisoners are incarcerated have a history of voting against legislation that will enhance education, job training and rehabilitation of prisoners. In effect, prisoners have no representation, and this is a clear violation of the "one man, one vote", guaranteed by our Constitution.

On the other hand, legislators from the prisoners' originating communities tend to be the ones advocating for improved education and rehabilitation services for prisoners who are not counted in their districts' population. To add insult to injury, Downstate towns are receiving entitlement funds for Community Development Block Grants and Social Service Development Block Grants that benefit their communities, but not the prisoners. When the prisoners return home their originating communities are the ones who must help them transition by providing housing, job training and other social services. Unfortunately, the originating communities don't get their full share of funding because the prisoners were counted in the Downstate town's Census statistics. I respectfully request that the Legislature support Representative LaShawn K. Ford's proposed legislation to ensure that prisoners are included in the Census counts from their originating communities.

### **Loss of Congressional Seat**

Because the State of Illinois' population grew at a slower rate than most states in the country, we will be losing a Congressional seat. Chicago's three Congressional Districts headed by African Americans have each lost population and must expand boundaries. There have also been proposals to eliminate one of the districts. I respectfully request that any new boundaries be drawn to protect the voting rights of African Americans by ensuring that we continue to be represented by each of the African American members of the Illinois Delegation. It should be noted that African Americans, as a percentage of Chicago's population was reduced by less than 1 percent. It should also be reiterated that our numbers are significantly undercounted due to the numbers of African Americans incarcerated in Downstate prisons.

### **Need for Public Hearing on West Side of Chicago**

I respectfully request that the Senate Redistricting Committee consider hosting a public hearing on redistricting on Chicago's West Side, at a time and location that is convenient for people from the community to attend. This meeting is scheduled for noon, and requires that people come significant distances on public transportation. The costs of parking are cost prohibitive for a number of people who prefer to drive. The Lawndale Alliance would be more than happy to work with you to do community outreach.

In closing, I thank you for your time and consideration, and hosting this public forum. If you have any questions, I may be reached at 773-521-3137 or [valeriefleonard@msn.com](mailto:valeriefleonard@msn.com).