

Tel: 312-328-1188

2216 S. Wentworth



Fax: 312-328-7452

**Testimony to Illinois Senate's Redistricting Committee
March 28, 2011**

My name is David Wu. I am the Executive Director of the Pui Tak Center, a church-based community center in Chicago's Chinatown. Pui Tak Center has been active in the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community's work in civic engagement and most recently on redistricting. I am also a resident of Chinatown and live in a two flat that my grandparents purchased about 60 years ago after they came from China.

As other CBCAC colleagues are presenting testimony on the characteristics of Chinatown, I would like to focus on two negative impacts that the 2001 redistricting had on Chinatown.

The first negative impact is the confusion that many Chinatown residents have about who their elected representatives are. You've probably have heard that Chinatown's population currently resides in four city wards, three state senate districts, four state house districts and three congressional districts. Tomorrow, a busload of adult ESL students from Chinatown will be going down to Springfield. They will be joining other adult education students in meeting their legislators. For most groups, the students know who their state representatives and state senator are because their community only has one of each. On the way down to Springfield, our students are going to be studying maps trying to figure out who their state representative and state senator are. For example,

- if you live north of the 25th Street and Lowe intersection, you're in the 9th state representative district,
- if you live on the southwest side of that intersection, you're in the 2nd district, and
- if you live on the southeast side of that intersection, you're in the 6th district.

Despite our community's best efforts to encourage civic engagement, having so many elected officials is often confusing and frustrating for those new to this country and discourages them from being informed and active citizens.

The second negative impact of being split into many districts is that the elected officials are not responsive to the community's needs. A few years ago, a legislator told a group of Chinatown leaders that our community was lucky to have so many legislators because we have multiple advocates in Springfield. Since Chinese Americans only make up a small part of their constituency, they don't get to know our community well. So rather than a lot of advocates, Chinatown needs a champion who will stand up and fight for what our community's needs.

What are some of our unmet needs in our community in which we need our legislators to be more responsive?

Fifty years ago, Chinatown lost its two parks when the Dan Ryan Expressway was built. At that time, the community was promised a replacement. Twelve years ago, the Ping Tom Park was built but the community continues to wait for a proposed field house.

Chinese immigrants, like so many other immigrants, come to the U.S. in hopes of a better life for their children. These immigrants encourage their children to study hard so schools and libraries are very important. The Chinatown branch is one of the busiest in the Chicago Public Library branches. It is also too small for the number of children, youth, adults and seniors that use the facility. In the afternoon and weekends, children are sitting on the floor as there is no other space for them to read and study. Chinatown has been advocating for a new, larger library.

There is also a need for a high school in our community. In the area that CBCAC is defining as Chinatown, there are no public high schools. The high school that serves the most Chinatown's youth is just west in the Brighton Park community. To get there, many youth spend 30 to 45 minutes traveling by public transportation.

Chinatown is blessed to have community and religious organizations that serve the needs of individuals and families. But the city, county and state have to be involved in meeting the infrastructure needs of our community. In the state's most recent capital bill, none of our legislators were able to secure funding for Chinatown projects. While there have been significant efforts by the city officials to move the field house and library projects forward, none of our legislators have been able to secure any state funds for these projects.

This experience has taught us that we don't need advocates that promise but can't deliver but a legislator who will partner with us and be a champion to fight on our behalf.

Thank you for considering Chinatown's desire to be a single district in the remap process.