



Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011

Why is redistricting important?

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. It is crucial that 2011 redistricting protects the voting rights of immigrants and minorities, giving us a full, fair chance to elect the candidates of our choice and participate in government. Recently released Census information shows that Asian Americans grew by 39% since 2000. In coalition with concerned community leaders, Asian American Institute (AAI) aims to make a positive impact on the redistricting process.

What is the importance of the new law?

The Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011 (also called Illinois Senate Bill 3976 and Public Law 096-1541) was signed into law on March 7, 2011. This new law will apply to the 2011 redistricting of the Illinois House and Illinois Senate districts.

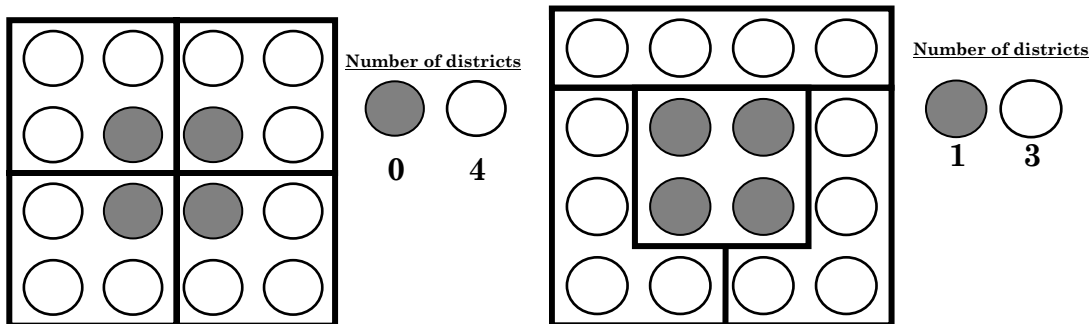
- ◆ **The new law strengthens the legal protection of residents of racial and language minorities**, including residents of Chicago's Chinatown and West Ridge neighborhoods. The new Illinois law provides greater and clearer protections for minority voters who do not constitute over 50% of a district.
- ◆ In addition to reiterating the federal Voting Rights Act, which states that racial and language minorities must have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, the new law also requires that the Illinois General Assembly draw the following types of districts:
 - **“Crossover districts,”** where the minority is potentially large enough to elect the candidate of its 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 new law strengthens the chance of minority neighborhoods having a full and fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice** who represent their interests and will be responsive to their needs.
- ◆ As stated by CW Chan, Chair of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), “Even though there are rapidly increasing numbers of Chinese voters and residents [in Chicago's Chinatown], we are so cut up that our collective voting power is greatly diminished, along with accountability of elected officials and attention to issues.”
- ◆ The new law requires the Illinois General Assembly to hold **four public hearings** to receive testimony and inform the public on redistricting.



During 2011 redistricting, it will be crucial for the Illinois General Assembly to:

- ◆ Keep cohesive communities of interest united when drawing district lines by respecting boundaries defined by the communities themselves.
- ◆ Improve the transparency of redistricting and consideration of public input beyond the minimum four hearings required by the new law. Specifically, 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 time for them to meaningfully review the proposals; and (3) give meaningful consideration to maps and comments from the public, especially community groups who are familiar with the needs of the neighborhoods at stake.

District lines have a real impact on whether minorities can participate in government and make a positive difference in their communities.



The full text of the law is available at <http://ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=096-1541>. For more information, please contact Ami Gandhi at 773-271-0899 x 222 or ami@aaichicago.org.