



**TESTIMONY BY THE ASIAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE
BEFORE THE ILLINOIS HOUSE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE
APRIL 21, 2011**

Submitted By:

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I. INTRODUCTION

Asian American Institute (also called AAI) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony during the 2011 redistricting process. We urge the Illinois General Assembly to give meaningful consideration to the input of Asian Americans, not just at these initial hearings but also after draft maps are released.

AAI is a pan-Asian, non-profit, non-partisan organization located in Chicago, Illinois whose mission is to empower the Asian American community through advocacy, research, education, and coalition-building. AAI's programs include legal advocacy, community organizing, and leadership development. AAI is a member of the national Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, whose other members include Asian American Justice Center in Washington, D.C., Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, and Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles.

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. For many years, AAI has been



working with the Asian American community at large to unite our neighborhoods into single districts and prevent further vote dilution as a result of redistricting. We work in coalition with other minority groups and reform groups, including Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), Illinois Campaign for Accountable Redistricting/Draw the Line Illinois (ICAR), and United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations (UCCRO).

In coalition with concerned community leaders, AAI aims to make a positive impact on the redistricting process. In today's testimony, we describe the legal protections of Asian American voting rights, current demographics of Asian Americans in Illinois, details about one of the areas of concern – the Greater West Ridge area of Chicago and portions of nearby suburbs, and the need for transparency throughout the redistricting process.

II. LEGAL PROTECTIONS OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTING RIGHTS

Under federal and state law, Asian Americans have the right to have votes that count. Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act prohibits any voting practice or procedure that results in the denial or abridgement of a person's right to vote based on race, color, or minority language status.¹ Specifically, the federal Voting Rights Act prohibits laws or practices that deny minority voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect candidates of their choice.²

The recently enacted Illinois Voting Rights Act provides additional protections for racial and language minorities.³ In addition to reiterating the federal Voting Rights Act, the new law also requires that the Illinois General Assembly draw “crossover

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 1973; *Thornburg v. Gingles*, 478 U.S. 30 (1986).

² *Id.*

³ ILL. PUBLIC ACT 096-1541 (2011).



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 Asian American community is deeply concerned about having an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and the ability to elect representatives of our choice. During hearings about redistricting reform in 2009 and 2010, AAI testified repeatedly about the rising numbers of residents and the corresponding fragmentation in the Greater Chinatown and Greater West Ridge neighborhoods in Chicago, as well as other compact communities in Illinois whose members have common ground in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social concerns. When trying to voice these concerns, neighborhood residents often have to go to two, three, or more legislators, who might not all agree with each other or who do not take Asian Americans seriously because the current district lines dilute the community’s vote. Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, Indo-American Center, Asian Broadcasting Network, Korean American Community Services, Islamic Circle of North America, South Asian Americans, and other community leaders and organizations are testifying today with details about our rising population and the devastating harm that we face as a result of unfair vote dilution. The fair representation of our community is a crucial step in having our unique needs effectively addressed.

During 2011 redistricting, the Illinois General Assembly must (1) protect the functional opportunity of racial and language minorities to elect the candidates of their choice; (2) guard against packing, cracking, and other forms of unfair vote dilution; and (3) keep cohesive communities of interest united when drawing district lines by respecting boundaries defined by the communities themselves. AAI and its allies plan to provide such community boundaries soon; we are in the process of obtaining input from community leaders and organizations in these areas, as it is important for us to consult the



people who live, work, and serve residents in those areas. Today, we present you with updated Census and demographic information that demonstrates that Asian Americans are a rapidly growing population whose voting rights must be respected during 2011 redistricting.

III. OVERVIEW OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN ILLINOIS

Since 2000, the Asian American population in Illinois has grown by 39%⁴, and we have been one of the fastest-growing populations in the state, while most other races have seen an overall decline. Asian Americans represent almost 5% of the state's population⁵, and in certain areas, the concentration is much higher. In areas such as Greater Chinatown, Greater West Ridge (including portions of West Ridge, Devon Avenue, West Rogers Park, North Park, Albany Park, and other neighborhoods), and portions of suburban Cook County, Asian Americans make up over 25% of the population; in DuPage County, Asians are 10% of the population. Twelve counties in Illinois experienced 100% or more Asian population growth since 2000.⁶ Even though Chicago's population decreased by nearly 7% since 2000, its Asian population increased by approximately 17%.⁷ And as discussed further below in Section IV, in certain geographic areas of concern to our community, Asian populations have grown significantly even though the overall population in those areas went down.

⁴ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000 & CENSUS 2010. In 2000, the number of people in Illinois who were Asian alone was 423,603. In 2010, this number increased to 586,934, a 39% increase. These figures were calculated using totals of people who selected a single race category of Asian. Additional data and citations are available from AAI upon request. In the coming months, AAI will be providing more analysis and details as additional Census figures continue to be released.

⁵ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010. In 2010, the number of people in Illinois who were Asian alone was 586,934 out of a total population of 12,830,632, which represents 5% of the population.

⁶ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000 & CENSUS 2010. Of these twelve counties, Cook, DuPage, and Lake Counties had the highest total Asian American population in 2000, and they continue to do so in 2010.

⁷ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.



Locally and nationally, Asian and Latino populations have grown considerably, in part because of relatively higher levels of immigration.⁸ Nationwide, between 2000 and 2010, the population of those who identify as Asian alone grew faster than any other major race group.⁹ Newly naturalized Americans, specifically Asians and Latinos, make up an increasingly large portion of the electorate – nationwide and in Illinois.¹⁰

AAI and its many community partners have worked to increase the civic engagement of Asian Americans in the Chicago area through projects such as Census outreach, non-partisan voter education and voter turnout, and redistricting advocacy. AAI's community partners include ethnic-specific and neighborhood-specific organizations throughout the Chicago area, and we collaborate on civic engagement efforts with groups such as Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment, Apna Ghar, Cambodian Association of Illinois, Asian Broadcasting Network, Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, Chinese American Service League, Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, Hamdard Center, Islamic Circle of North America, Indo-American Center, Muslim Women's Resource Center, Korean American Community Services, Korean American Resource and Cultural Center, Korean American Women in Need, Lao American Organization of Elgin, Metro Asian Family Services, Pui Tak Center, South Asian American Policy and Research Institute, Southeast Asia Center, Vietnamese Association of Illinois, and Vietnamese Senior Association of Chicago.

⁸ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *2010 Census Shows America's Diversity: Hispanic and Asian Populations Grew Fastest During Decade* (Mar. 24, 2011) (press release).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Rob Paral & Assocs., *The New American Electorate: The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children*, at 4 (Oct. 2008), available at <http://immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/NewCitizenVotersWEBversion.pdf>; Rob Paral & Assocs., *Supplement to The New American Electorate: The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children*, at 5 (Oct. 2008), available at <http://robparal.com/downloads/NewAmericansSupplementEthnicity.pdf>.



Asian Americans are now nearly 5% of the state's population¹¹, and Asian Americans have assumed a growing role as leaders in the state's business, educational, and community organizations, but an Asian American has still never been elected to the Illinois General Assembly or any statewide office. Over 100 Asian Americans in Cook and DuPage Counties have run for elected office, including federal, state, and local positions, with the majority of these candidates running for office in the past 10 years. Yet, since 2000, over 75% of these Asian American candidates have lost, and *all* Asian American candidates for the Illinois General Assembly or statewide offices have lost.

Contributing to the problem of Asian Americans not having the full and fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, redistricting in Illinois has fragmented Asian American neighborhoods and diluted the community's vote. After the 2000 Census, *five* Illinois Senate districts were over 10% Asian American¹²; yet, after the lines were redrawn in 2001, only *two* Senate districts were over 10% Asian American¹³. *Based on the current district lines and recently released 2010 Census data, 16 House districts and 10 Senate Districts are over 10% Asian American.*¹⁴ Similarly, at the Congressional level, four Congressional districts were over 7% Asian American after the 2000 Census, but after 2001 redistricting, only two districts remained over 7%.¹⁵ The most recent Census shows that there are now five districts that are over 7%. The Asian American population in the northwest suburbs is booming, and it is now is over 12% of the population there.¹⁶ For example, in Hoffman Estates, Asian Americans make up 22.7% of the population, and in Schaumburg, Asian Americans make up 19.8% of the population. There are similarly large Asian American communities in South Barrington,

¹¹ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

¹² Redistricting Website of Illinois Speaker of the House, *available at* <http://clients.ecampaigning.com/ilr/data/2ksenate.htm> (citing 2000 U.S. Census Data by Illinois Senate District).

¹³ Redistricting Website of Illinois Speaker of the House, *available at* http://clients.ecampaigning.com/ilr/data/currieii_house.htm (citing Currie II (as Amended by Bilandic Amendment) House Districts – Total Population).

¹⁴ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Asian Population Booming in Suburbs*, DAILY HERALD (Mar. 6, 2011), *available at* <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20110306/news/703069929>.



Streamwood, Hanover Park, Buffalo Grove, and other places in close proximity. Despite this fact, Asian Americans in these areas are divided into at least three congressional districts – Congressional Districts 6, 8, and 10 – thus diluting their electoral strength.

Clearly, Asian Americans are an important stakeholder in this year’s redistricting process at the state and Congressional levels.

IV. GREATER WEST RIDGE AND OTHER NEARBY ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

You are all by now familiar with the example of the Greater Chinatown area in Chicago, a cohesive community that has experienced unfair fragmentation. We are also here, however, to bring your attention to several other compact Asian American communities whose residents have common ground in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social concerns and who should be kept together in single districts during redistricting. One example is the Greater West Ridge area (including portions of West Ridge, Devon Avenue, West Rogers Park, North Park, Albany Park, and other Chicago neighborhoods) and nearby portions of suburban Cook County, including portions of Skokie, Morton Grove, Des Plaines, and Niles. As can be seen on map attached to this testimony (“Map”), not only is there a high concentration of Asian Americans in these areas, but there is also a plethora of institutions in the area that are vital to our community members, including non-profit organizations; religious institutions; schools; and ethnic media, retail, and commercial outlets.

AAI is in the process of obtaining input from community leaders and organizations in these areas, as well as analyzing data about these areas, as it is important for us to consult the people who live, work, and serve community members in those areas. We intend to present updated maps in the near future that set forth boundaries of community areas that should be kept within single districts during the redistricting process.



As shown by recently released Census data, the districts in this area (namely, Illinois House Districts 15, 16, 17, and 57, and Illinois Senate Districts 8, 9, and 29) all faced loss of population or their population stayed the same between 2000 and 2010.¹⁷ However, each of these same areas experienced significant growth of Asian population, ranging from 10% to 32% growth.¹⁸ This demographic trend points to the need to protect the voting rights of these Asian Americans and consider their input when redrawing these lines.

The residents in the areas represented on the Map have common ground not just in terms of race, but also in terms of history, ethnicity, language, and social issues.¹⁹ Most of the Asian Americans in this area are Asian Indian, Korean, or Filipino.²⁰ There are also clusters of Pakistani, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian American residents in these areas.²¹ Languages spoken in the area include Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Punjabi, Malayalam, Bengali, Telegu, Nepali, Tagalog, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. Even though there is diversity within these communities, Asian Americans are a cohesive group that share many common concerns, such as the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate social services, as well as concerns about education, affirmative action, immigration, discrimination, hate crimes, and racial profiling.

Residents of this particular area of Chicago and suburban Cook County face similar social problems, including limited access to public transportation; low income; and limited English proficiency and linguistic isolation.²² People in this area also have

¹⁷ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2010.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *See, e.g.*, WEST RIDGE COMMUNITY SURVEY, University of Illinois Extension - Cook County (Oct. 2007) (research study analyzing data and collecting input from over 90 residents of West Ridge as well as several community organizations, over the course of eleven one-hour focus groups and over 700 comments about life in West Ridge); U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

²⁰ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *See, e.g.*, WEST RIDGE COMMUNITY SURVEY, University of Illinois Extension - Cook County (Oct. 2007); U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.



other unique concerns that unite them, including concerns about small, minority-owned businesses; commercial corridors and business development; cultural diversity and demographic change; residential development and public spaces; government services; crime; and education.²³ This area is a gateway for many immigrants and new citizens who are in the process of adjusting to the United States.

Growing numbers of Asian American children and families in these areas have unique concerns that need to be addressed effectively by the elected officials who represent them. Just as one example, the Village of Skokie has reported that approximately 56% of their public school students speak a language other than English at home, and of these languages, the largest categories are Urdu or Spanish (between 2004 and 2010, Urdu and Spanish have gone back and forth as the first and second top languages spoken at home by Skokie students, other than English).²⁴ Significant numbers of Skokie students also speak other Asian languages at home, including Tagalog, Korean, Gujarati, Arabic, Malayalam, Vietnamese, and Cantonese.²⁵ In the areas of Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles, and Lincolnwood, there are 11 school districts where Asians make up over 25% of the enrollment.²⁶ In two of these 11 school districts, Asian enrollment is higher than the enrollment of any other race.²⁷ In nearly all of these 11 school districts, over 20% of the school's students have limited English proficiency.²⁸ Thus, a significant portion of residents in this area share the common need for linguistically appropriate education and social services, and this requires effective representation by a legislator who truly feels accountable to this unique community.

As another example, Asian Americans in the West Ridge and Albany Park neighborhoods constitute a cohesive community with similar social issues and interests,

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ VILL. OF SKOKIE, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ ILL. STATE BD. OF ED. SCHOOL REPORT CARDS (2010); U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2005-2009 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATE.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*



as many of them are recent immigrants who have working-class lifestyles. This community contains many Asian Americans of Filipino, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese, and Pakistani backgrounds. Many of Filipino and South Asian residents in both in the West Ridge neighborhood and Albany Park neighborhood feel strong connections to each other, particularly because of the social service institutions, religious institutions and schools, ethnic media outlets, and retail outlets that serve residents in West Ridge and Albany Park.

Thus, it is natural that over the past several years, there have been pan-Asian coalitions formed with members of these communities to work on civic engagement and voter participation programs. For example, for the 2010 Census, organizations in Albany Park and West Ridge, among others, came together to conduct Census outreach in 10 different languages, making it the most accessible Census campaign in history for the local Asian American population. For the 2011 mayoral election in Chicago, many of the same Asian American organizations came together to educate voters in Albany Park and in West Ridge, and many of the residents in these neighborhoods united at the first ever Asian American Mayoral Candidates' Forum. Over 1000 Asian American Chicagoans attended this forum to hear what the candidates had to say about issues that mattered to their community such as public safety, public education, funding for immigrant integration social services, and support for small businesses.

Despite all these commonalities and connections between West Ridge and Albany Park, this contiguous area is currently split into many different Illinois House districts and Illinois Senate districts. AAI will soon be providing additional maps and analysis to detail this fragmentation. The Asian Americans in this area identify as one unified community of interest and will be better represented when they are not fragmented into multiple districts.



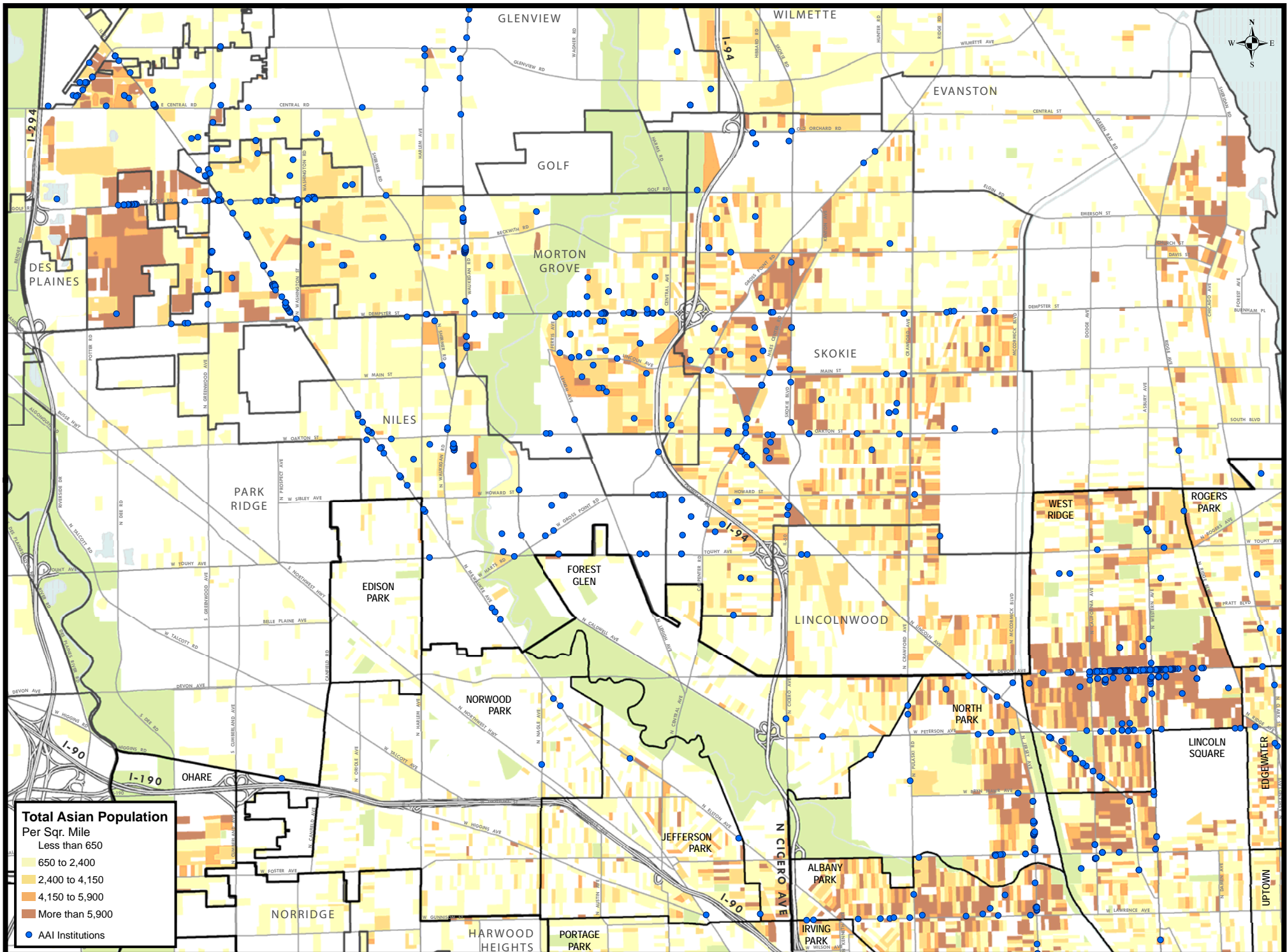
V. NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY AND CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC INPUT

In order for there to be meaningful transparency and consideration of public input during redistricting, 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 reasonable time for them to review the proposals; and (3) give serious consideration to maps and comments from the public, especially community groups who are familiar with the needs of the neighborhoods at stake. Those drawing the maps cannot legitimately keep in mind the needs of communities unless they hear first-hand from the public both before and after coming up with draft maps. The public must also have prompt access to redistricting data, draft maps, and hearing transcripts and recordings, in order to give useful input on where district lines should be drawn. Asian Americans gave input during the 2001 redistricting process, but our communities were still further splintered, which points to the need for greater consideration of public input.

VI. CONCLUSION

Asian American Institute urges the Committee and other members of the General Assembly to remain mindful of the rights of Asian Americans and other minority communities in Illinois. The Asian American community has faced egregious vote dilution a result of past redistricting. We urge you to ensure that this unfortunate history is not repeated. Many of our community members and allies are here today to express that Asian Americans' input should be meaningfully considered during the redistricting process. AAI would be glad to provide additional information or analysis upon request.

Areas of Asian Population & Asian Institutions: 2010



Source: Asian American Institute

House Redistricting Committee Hearing – Thursday, April 21, 2011

Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Lakshmi Lakshmanan and I am a private practice immigration attorney and I am also the part-time managing attorney of the immigration services provided at the Indo-American Center.

The Indo-American Center is a Chicago-based non-profit organization working in Chicago's West Ridge community to assist South Asian immigrants as they adjust to American society. The Center is one of the largest and well-established organizations serving the South-Asian community in the Chicago-land area. The Center's mission is to promote the well being of South Asian immigrants through services that facilitate their adjustment, integration and friendship with the wider society, nurturing their sense of community, and fostering appreciation for their heritage and culture. In accordance with this mission, the Center operates seven main programs to offer a full range of community support, including Citizenship and Immigration Services, Public Benefits Assistance, an Adult Literacy Program, a Youth Development Program, Civics and American History courses, Computer courses, and a Seniors' Milan Program.

Through my work at the Indo-American Center I see first-hand the rapidly growing South Asian population and the need for services. When I say South Asians, I am referring to a people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and Bhutanese descent. I am certain that other sister organizations who also serve the South Asian community, such as the Hamdard Center, Apna Ghar, Muslim Women's Resource Center, can attest to the growth in our community in the in Rogers Park, West Ridge and Albany Park area. Furthermore, many of our religious and educational institutions, social service organizations and many small and large businesses are located in this area. The South Asian population has its own unique social needs related to the assimilation in America, raising children in two cultures, learning to communicate in English and understanding and navigating the immigration process.

According to the Census in 2010, Illinois' Asian population was the fastest growing in the state, swelling in the collar counties. Yet despite our growing population, there is not even one Asian American publicly elected state official that reflects this dramatic shift. District lines have a real impact on whether we as minorities can participate in government and make a positive difference in our communities.

There is cohesiveness within the South Asian and the Asian American community at large. We come from different countries, but we share many cultural and social similarities. For that reason, Asian American Institute has sought the input of my community in various projects relating to civic engagement like Census outreach, voter education, and redistricting advocacy.

As the South Asian population is growing it is important that the population be grouped together so that we can elect candidates who represent our community, can better serve the needs of our community and we, as South Asians, collectively have a strong voice. As a South Asian who is vested in the community having a collective voice, I ask the committee members to ensure that the South Asian population in Rogers Park, West Ridge and Albany Park be kept within one district during the state's redistricting process.

We urge you to show the community the General Assembly's draft maps. We appreciate the chance to be heard today, but we also request you to give meaningful consideration to our input *after* we can review the legislature's draft maps. We are working with Asian American Institute to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will submit those to you soon.

Sincerely,

Lakshmi Lakshmanan
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April 21, 2011 Testimony to Illinois House of Representatives Redistricting Committee

Hello everyone and thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Ahmed Ansari and I am an associate at the Islamic Circle of North America's Chicago branch, which I will refer to as ICNA from now on. We are located on California Avenue just south of Devon in the heart of the West Ridge neighborhood. Through my involvement with the community, I am exposed to the concerns of many South Asians on the North side of Chicago. When I say South Asians, I am referring to a people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and Bhutanese descent. Even though we come from different countries, there are many cultural and social similarities between our groups.

Established in 1968, the Islamic Circle of North America was a response to the growing need for a supportive Muslim community in North America. The organization initially focused on educating its growing membership about Islam, the goal being to adhere to Islamic values amongst a religiously diverse community. In the early 70s, ICNA members, the majority of whom were of South Asian descent, focused their efforts on education and personal/spiritual development.

ICNA has worked to establish connections between Islam and the public, collaborating with numerous Muslim organizations to reach this end. ICNA also works closely with many national interfaith organizations for the betterment of society. By focusing on self-development, education, outreach and social services, ICNA has cemented its place as a leading grassroots organization in the American Muslim community.

The reason I am here today is to explain the connection between our South Asian community in West Ridge and the South Asian community in Albany Park, which is anchored by the Muslim Community Center, which I will refer to as MCC from now on. MCC is located near Pulaski and Montrose in Albany Park and is the oldest and one of the largest mosques in the Chicago land area. MCC is an important community institution not only for religious worship, but also for education of adults and children, health services, programs for women and children, and interfaith programs.

Many of our community members from ICNA send their children to learn about our faith at MCC. MCC also hosts events that bring together the larger community in the West Ridge and Albany Park area.

While the West Ridge area also has its share of mosques on Devon, many of the Muslim community members interact actively with Muslim community members in Albany Park, for example through programs hosted by MCC and the following events as well:

1. During relief efforts for disasters around the world like Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, earthquakes and floods in Pakistan and Japan, we South Asians in West

Ridge and Albany Park join our efforts to do fundraising for these noble causes and motivate our community to participate and help.

2. When Muslim scholars visit Chicago, we join together to arrange programs which benefit our community spiritually as well as develop our knowledge in different religious areas.
3. During the special month of Ramadan, MCC arranges special events and dinners many Muslims from West Ridge area like to join these events.

We have also seen that when our communities are protected as one area of interest, we see more public understanding of our communities and less prejudice and even hate crimes committed against us. During the years post 9-11 we have seen the trend that hate crimes were more prevalent and targeted towards community members who lived outside of our geographic communities where the general public is not as well informed about the Muslim community and where we do not have strong support of our elected officials. For this reason, it is imperative to continue to further identify West Ridge and Albany Park as one united community of interest as many South Asians, both Muslims and non-Muslims live, work and worship in this area. There are similarities within the South Asian American community at large and also the Asian American community at large. We come from different countries, but we share many cultural and social similarities. For that reason, Asian American Institute has sought my community's input about redistricting.

We want the fragmentation of our community to be reduced because that will increase our concentration in the new districts and will further enhance our ability to influence and shape the identity of the community. We as South Asian Americans want to be treated fairly during the redistricting process.

Thank you.

Submitted by

Ahmad Ansari

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April 21, 2011 Testimony to Illinois House Redistricting Committee

I am Sharda Thapa testifying as a member of the Nepali-American community, one of the groups within the Asian American community. I have lived in Chicago for 34 years, 18 of them in the West Rogers Park neighborhood, which is also sometimes called the West Ridge neighborhood. I am a self-employed freelance business consultant who has been active in my community and in Asian-American activities since 1981, mainly in the areas of founding, growing and maintaining social and cultural organizations. Recently, I have become active in civic and political affairs, especially in helping Asian-Americans gain fair representation in elective government and the ability to elect candidates of our choice - an area we have been lacking in.

The Nepali-American community in Chicagoland, including immigrants from Nepal as well as people of Nepali descent, has grown from less than 100 in 1980 to nearly 10,000 now and more than a quarter of them are estimated to reside in the north-northwest section of Chicago and the nearby suburbs like Skokie and Niles. Over time, the population has tended to shift gradually, as people established themselves, from the city to the close-in suburbs and then farther out. The number of immigrants is being augmented by the recent resettlement in the northern part of Chicago of substantial numbers of Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan, who are Nepali ethnics driven out in the 1980s, and their families. This is the most notable concentration of the community in the entire area and the phenomenon is closely linked to the growth of the Devon area corridor as a South Asian hub, comprising people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali descent. As a long-time West Rogers Park resident, I have observed its growing importance to this community because of its concentration of social and cultural institutions, family-owned businesses and immigrant residents. These effective and efficient means of providing much-needed services can only be enhanced if the contiguity is maintained and the institutions receive both credit and funding for providing these services.

Since Nepali-Americans are a relatively new immigrant group, there are no established social service institutions and support organizations targeted to this group. As a result, many in our community who need social services or other resources rely on agencies established with other South Asians or Asians in mind. This is expected to continue.

Nepali-Americans originally arrived here independently as professionals or students or associated with Indian emigrant entrepreneurs, usually as employees. Many of these Nepalis have been helped up by earlier Indian and Pakistani immigrants. There is no travel, work or residency restrictions between India and Nepal and some of these ties continued into the US. The religious, cultural, food and living styles of Nepal are very analogous to India and Tibet, more the former. It is therefore fair to say that all South Asian immigrants would like to remain together and benefit from being within one

district or a few districts, rather than being split up into many districts. We could then elect candidates of our choice responsive to our unique needs.

There is cohesiveness within the Asian American community at large. We come from different countries, but we share many cultural and social similarities. For that reason, Asian American Institute has sought the input of the South Asian community and West Rogers Park community in various projects relating to civic engagement like Census outreach, voter education, and redistricting advocacy.

Nepali-Americans will generally endorse boundaries drawn to respect our community and the other South Asian communities. We are working with AAI to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will give those to you soon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I urge you to give meaningful consideration to the Asian American community's input and to treat our community fairly during the redistricting process.

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Illinois House Redistricting Committee Hearing April 21, 2011.

Dear Chairperson Representative Barbara Flynn Currie and members of the House Redistricting Committee,

First of all thank you for allowing me to speak here today. What has brought me here is continuous and consistent restlessness, insecurity and a sense of loss which haunts most of my community members in their newly adopted country, simply because they don't have any voice in any public office at the local, state and federal level. This is predominantly because of the present district lines which cut them into smaller groups, not because of any lack of political and social activism.

Let me give you a brief history of my involvement and quote an example to emphasize what I am trying to prove.

I have been involved with the South Asian Community in the Chicago area since 1990. As background, when I say "South Asian," I am referring to a subgroup within Asian Americans that includes people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and Bhutanese descent. Even though we come from different countries, there are many cultural and social similarities between our groups.

I have lived in the north side of Chicago since 1990. I ran a community broadcasting network since 1994, started first ever local Pakistani Urdu TV program in 1994, and first ever Urdu/Hindi talk show in North America in 1997. I write in more than two ethnic news papers and correspond for 4 television networks. I have been a board member of human services organizations like Hamdard Center for Health and Human Services and Metropolitan Asian Family Services. I am part of Community Builders, a very active group of South Asians mainly from India and Pakistan, which organizes seminars and workshops to educate the community at large on political, social, civic and mental health issues. My relationship with my community is more than casual. I am a social and political activist, a journalist and a resident of Rogers Park in the West Ridge area. I have seen Devon Avenue as a thriving business district and I am seeing its decline now, partly due to lack of responsiveness and effective coordination by elected officials.

In 1999 during a meeting of business and community leaders on TIF funding, when I confronted the Alderman of 50th Ward Mr. Bernard Stone against his one sided attempt to impose zoning on the side streets of Devon Avenue during day time hours and pointed out that it will kill the businesses. He responded that the business owners are not his constituents and he doesn't care about them. He only cares for his voters. Mind you all those businesses were bringing revenue and providing jobs to the local residents, mostly South Asians. Since then the parking situation and its accompanied hazards have killed

this business district. The profound effects of parking problems in this area have been analyzed and documented in the 2007 West Ridge Community Survey (on file with the Asian American Institute). Similar lack of responsiveness from not just city but also state officials makes it quite difficult for community members to have their problems resolved effectively.

The South Asian community is increasing in number in the Rogers Park, West Ridge, and Albany Park neighborhoods at a phenomenal rate. There are newly immigrated women raising children but lacking communication with their teachers or health care workers because of language and other social hurdles. There are undocumented kids, hundreds of them, suffering for what they haven't done consciously or intentionally. There are even men who couldn't assimilate in the system because of lack of language and social skills or some other communicative problems. There is domestic violence, child and parent abuse which most of the time go unnoticed. These are just a few examples of the growing need for culturally and linguistically appropriate social services, services that are threatened when legislators do not feel accountable to our community.

One of the core institutions for the Muslim community is the Muslim Community Center (MCC) located near Montrose and Pulaski. This is the oldest Mosque in the Chicagoland area and it is also one of the largest. MCC has been the reason why Muslim immigrants settle in the Albany Park area. The religious education they are able to provide and the ability for Muslims to come to the Mosque for their daily prayers are main reasons that drive Asian and Arab Muslims to this area. MCC is an important community institution for religious worship and education, and also for health services, programs for women and children, and interfaith programs. The South Asian population is significant and cohesive in the West Ridge and Albany Park area and these areas must be protected as a united community of interest.

Honorable members of the committee, our country is going through a critical time which puts national security on top priority. Our security agencies and diplomatic missions need people with multilingual and multicultural skills. By neglecting the local populations of immigrants and their children, we are failing to nurture people who could be very useful for national security and other beneficial purposes.

These social, cultural and educational deficiencies cannot effectively be dealt with by dividing similar populations instead of uniting them.

If you divide communities of interest you promote social and cultural ailments, and if you keep them together you promote a healthy environment for their social and communal growth.

All Asians whichever country or region they come from share lots of common values. They face almost the same problems and hurdles as immigrants. You have the power to

facilitate in creating districts which could help these people to get maximum benefit of our system to promote their social, cultural and educational well being. This will help create a healthy state and nation.

Honorable members of the committee let me address something which seems probably not directly related to redistricting but have an indirect relation. I belong to a community which is continuously under surveillance since 911. I will not deny the presence of religious extremism in a minority of the Muslim population, same like it is found in any other faith group but the majority of my community is as American and as liberal as any other person of a different faith. It is easy for extremist elements to take advantage of a discontented, disrespected, disregarded, distressed and divided community by exploiting the injustices and disparities, insecurity and poverty. It is very difficult to take advantage of a united, harmonious and satisfied community. It is you honorable members of the community who can give them this harmony and strength.

Asian American Institute, Council of Islamic Organizations and many grass root organizations are working hard to help the legislators in drawing fair districts. The Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi community of the North side of Chicago endorses these efforts and hope that the legislators would work closely with these grass root organizations. We are working with Asian American Institute to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will submit those to you soon.

Thank you.

Dr. Mujahid Ghazi

President

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April 21, 2011 Testimony to Illinois House of Representative Redistricting Committee

My name is Hye Young Lee, program director at Korean American Community Services, also called KACS. Founded in 1972, KACS is a non-profit, non-partisan organization located in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago, which provides health and wellness, social, educational, youth, senior, and other services to Korean Americans and other community members. KACS remains an important source of services for many immigrants and minorities, in spite of recent state budget cuts. KACS provides opportunities for Korean seniors and other Korean immigrants to access resources to help them better their lives. Whether it is through helping fill out public benefit forms, or assisting seniors in day to day activities, KACS provides an invaluable service for the betterment of the Korean American community here in Chicago.

Albany Park is a vibrant multi-ethnic neighborhood that has been a neighborhood of immigrants for generations. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many South Korean immigrants (moving forward I will refer to them as Koreans) settled in the area and played a key role in redeveloping Lawrence Avenue to be a booming commercial corridor. In early 1986 the Korean community, working with their alderman, was able to give an honorary name to a portion of Lawrence Avenue, calling it Seoul Drive named after the capitol city of South Korea.

While the Korean American population count has decreased over the last decade, Korean Americans still remain in Albany Park and the presence of other immigrants and minorities has increased. The Korean Americans who do remain in Albany Park are a combination of (1) recent immigrants who are mostly low-income with limited English proficiency and (2) senior citizens living in senior housing.

There are also a significant number of Korean business owners who work in Albany Park, catering to the Koreans who still live in Albany Park as well as other Asian Americans in the community.

Korean Americans, while smaller in number, have come together with other Asian ethnic groups because we have discovered that we have shared experiences and interests, as low-income recent immigrants in the neighborhood who also share some cultural affinity with one another. While Asian Americans speak many languages thus making the communications a bit difficult, many bi-lingual social service agencies that serve various Asian ethnic groups have come together to work on Asian American issues. The Korean American Community Services, where I work, plays a significant role in building this coalition with other Asian Americans. We not only provide access for Korean Americans to public resources, we help build a larger Asian American coalition to address needs and interest that cross our language barriers.

There is cohesiveness within the Asian American community at large. We come from different countries, but we share many cultural and social similarities. For that reason, Asian American Institute has sought the input of the Korean community in various

projects relating to civic engagement like Census outreach, voter education, and redistricting advocacy. For example, the Asian American Coalition for Census 2010 was made up of 10 different Asian ethnic organizations, all with the same interest of making Census more accessible by providing language support and education in 10 different languages. This effort reached out to many South Asian, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese and Cambodian American residents in Albany Park and West Ridge

There have also been joint efforts by this same pan-Asian coalition to mobilize voters for the 2011 Mayoral election. We were able to jointly reach Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos and South Asian Americans in Albany Park and West Ridge to get out and vote. We held a Mayoral Candidates' Forum for the Asian American community, asking candidates questions that mattered to the Asian American community and translating the forum into 4 different Asian languages.

As you can see, Asian Americans in the city, especially in the West Ridge and Albany Park neighborhoods have a strong sense of community. Our community is united not just by race but also by many other socioeconomic factors that we have in common, such as limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

We ask that the committee preserves these neighborhoods, and go further by keeping West Ridge and Albany Park in the same State House district. District lines have a real impact on whether we as minorities can participate in government and make a positive difference in our communities. We want to see the General Assembly's draft maps. We request you to give meaningful consideration to our input *after* you have released your draft maps but *before* the district lines are finalized. We are working with Asian American Institute to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will submit those to you soon.

Thank you.

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