

## STATEMENT

- Good morning, Committee Members. My name is Abigail Vences. I have students at Swift Elementary and Mather High School and I also serve on the Local School Councils at both of those schools. I am a parent leader with Kids First Chicago.
- While I am excited to be moving into a new era for Chicago with this shift to an elected school board, there are several issues about the way this is being done that give me concern.
- I believe that a school board that reflects CPS's diversity can better understand the needs of children in our communities and will deliver better results for our students.
- This legislature had the opportunity to create districts that could have made reflective representation more likely, and yet you are here today voting on 10 districts for 2024–4 of which will be mostly White, 3 mostly Black, and 3 mostly Latino, to represent a school district that is 90% children of color.
- While I don't think you did the best job you could have with the districts, there is still an opportunity for the mayor to use his appointments to ensure that the 2025-2026 board is reflective of our students.
- Actually, there is an opportunity for the Mayor to use his appointments to address another priority for the future school board. I personally think it is important for parents to serve on the new elected school board. I worry that this new law is not conducive for average parents to win elections, and the mayor has the ability to ensure that the board has parent representation, at least for the first two years of its existence.
- There are also things that this body can address to make school board service more accessible for parents.
- Limiting the influence of money on elections and allowing compensation for board members may be ways to make it more friendly for parent candidates.
- However, this bill you are voting on today actually makes it more difficult for parents to run for these seats by increasing the number of petition signatures that are required for candidates to get their names on the ballot. In fact, by adding a maximum number of signatures that can be submitted, you seem to be attempting to limit the ability of grassroots candidates to be successful, effectively stacking the deck for those with political experience, backing of interest groups, and who can raise enough money to pay for campaign operations that can meet strict petition requirements.
- I respectfully ask the members of this committee to continue to use your power as legislators to improve this new school board law. If this new school board does not represent our communities and does not include a significant number of

actual parents, it will not understand the challenges faced by our students and I fear it will not be successful.

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