



Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

Public Comments To the Illinois Senate Executive Committee And the Illinois House Executive Committee Regarding the Chicago Elected Representative School Board March 7, 2024

Hello, my name is Valerie Leonard, the Co-Founder of Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting, (IAAFER). IAAFER is a coalition that was formed in 2021 to ensure that the State's redistricting process was implemented taking into account issues of concern to Black people around the state. When we realized that operationalizing Chicago's Elected Representative School Board requires drawing electoral districts, we expanded our advocacy to include developing a comprehensive proposal to create electoral districts based on the City's ward boundaries, while creating a standing Black Student Achievement Committee of the Chicago Board of Education.

When the Senate closed its Fall Veto Session in November 2023, we felt that we had a meeting of the minds regarding the implementation of the ERSB. It was our understanding that you stood by your proposal for a 20-district Board, with all members being elected, and every Chicago voter having the opportunity to elect a candidate of his/her choice, from his/her own community.

What we have come to witness over the past few days is a stark reminder that we live in Chicago, Illinois, and that "Progressive" doesn't mean the same here as it does in other places. We have soon reverted to the politics of old, where the voices of the people, particularly Black Voters, are not on equal footing as others. We have a situation clearly, in which some people are "more equal than others". With that said, I am sharing IAAFERs concerns and positions below.

Organized Labor Voices Trump Black Voters

The Senate Executive Committee held a hearing Tuesday and approved a school board mapping implementation plan that would allow for half the school board to be elected. The only Chicago Senator who voted against this bill was Senator Feigenholtz. This, despite the fact that a significant majority of people who completed witness slips were against the measure. There were 82 witness slips filed in opposition, and 9 witness slips filed in support, a margin of over 9:1. It should be noted that, for the most part, an overwhelming majority of people who supported the measure were from CTU, SEIU, the AFL-CIO, registered lobbyists, or employed with the City of Chicago. The overwhelming majority of people who were against the measure were Black. I have attached copies of the witness slip results for your review.

The Senate sent the House two versions: 1 with a fully elected Board of Education (SB 2233), and another version, with half the board members being elected (SB15). The House Executive Committee rammed the hybrid version legislation through yesterday afternoon, with less than 3 hours' notice for a hearing to avoid having open and honest input from the community.

I have also attached copies of the witness slips from the House Executive Committee hearing. Again, the support for the bill came from organized labor, while the opposition was predominantly from the Black community. There were 8 proponents and 19 opponents, a margin of more than 2:1 in opposition. The margin, no doubt, would have been much greater with more notice.

I have just learned, as I write these public comments, that the full House just rammed this legislation through. This is unsurprising, but disappointing, nonetheless.

We oppose SB15 for the following reasons:

The Senate reversed their position from November 2023 Veto Session. Under their November proposal, all 20 districts were elected. Everybody could vote for a school board representative of their choice. Anybody who wanted to run could run. That is no longer true with the new proposal, which now mirrors the deeply flawed House version of the bill.

This bill was crafted by the Chicago Teachers Union, and allows them to continue to exert undue influence and control over school policies. We need checks and balances and a structure that allows for more diversity of thought in the development of school policies. Having a Chicago Board of Education so heavily influenced by the CTU presents an apparent conflict of interest, as the Board of Education is responsible for setting school policies and negotiating contracts. We need a governing body that will act independently.

This bill will effectively extend mayoral control of our schools until 2027, as opposed to 2025. The purpose of having an elected school board is to provide more accountability to the voters. The CTU fought for a fully elected school board for years. They reversed course now that one of their members has been elected as Mayor. The Mayor, a former CTU organizer, and the current Board of Education President were against a hybrid board before the last Mayoral election.

In November, half the Chicago Board of Education will be elected and half will be appointed by the Mayor, along with the President of the Board of Education. This creates 2 classes of Board members, with the majority being beholden to the Mayor, and the remaining Board members being beholden to the Voters

The bill makes it harder for the average person to get on the ballot. The petition signature requirement increased from 500 registered voters to 1,000 registered voters. The signature requirement for an Illinois member of Congress is 400. A typical Chicago Elected School Board District will have about 274,000 people. An Illinois Congressional district has about 750,000 people.

The bill is extremely confusing. History has shown that public policies that are difficult to understand tend to minimize engagement and can lead to voter suppression. A copy of a graphic developed by the House is found below. I have tried to discuss this with a number of elected officials and their staffs. Some pretended not to understand my questions. Some honestly didn't know how to answer my questions. The others who did answer my questions gave different answers. There is no universal agreement as to what was meant or what was intended by this legislative proposal. I can only tell you that the effects will be harmful to democracy.

REPRESENTATION FOR ALL PLAN

Everyone votes in 2024, in 10 nested districts designated **A** and **B**. If the **elected member** resides in **District 1A**, the **appointed member** must reside in **District 1B** or vice versa. Together, they represent District 1 for two years as is laid out in law.

Everyone votes in 2026, in 20 separate districts. If the representative elected in 2024 resided in **District 1A**, that district will elect a member to a four-year term; **District 1B**, having been home to the appointed representative, will elect a member to a two-year term. **District 1B** elects an incumbent to a four-year term in 2028, staggering the board elections going forward.



In closing, I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Valerie F. Leonard

Co-Founder, IAAFER

Attachment A-1
Witness Slips for Senate Amendment 001
Proponents

[SB0015](#)
[Senate Amendment 001](#)
[Bill Status](#)

Legislation: Senate Amendment 001

Proponents: 9 Opponents: 82 No Position: 1

Name	Firm, Business Or Agency	Representing
Hearing Date and Time: Executive (S) 3/5/2024 10:30 AM		
Andrea Kluger	Chicago Federation of Labor	Chicago Federation of Labor
Eli Brottman	Self	Self
Derek Blaida	Blaida and Associates LLC	City of Chicago
Sean Denney	Illinois Education Association	Illinois Education Association
Crystal Gardner	SEIU LOCAL 73	SEIU LOCAL 73
Dave Comerford	Illinois Federation of Teachers	Illinois Federation of Teachers
Frances K Orenic	IL AFL-CIO	IL AFL-CIO
Kurt Hilgendorf	Chicago Teachers Union	Chicago Teachers Union
Mike Ciaccio	City of Chicago	City of Chicago

Attachment A-2
Witness Slips for Senate Amendment 001
Opponents

Legislation: Senate Amendment 001

Proponents: 9 **Opponents: 82** **No Position: 1**

Name	Firm, Business Or Agency	Representing
Hearing Date and Time: Executive (S) 3/5/2024 10:30 AM		
Augustine Emuwa	Resident	Black community, Black children in CPS, Parents
Brian Mullins	Black American Voters Project	Black American Residents of Illinois
Carmen Strickland	Opponent	Black children in Chicago Public Schools, Black Community, South Side
Dorothy Lacy	resident of city of chicago	resident taxpayer of city of chicago
Eugene C Varnado	Retired	Black Community, Black children in CPS and their parents
Jennie Newsome	CAC LAC	Black community, senior citizens in public housing
Kenneth Cook	The Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP	The Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP
Mark Thompson	None	Black students in CPS, Black Community, South Side
Michael Young-Bey	MOOR REAL NEWS	MOOR REAL NEWS
Natasha Dunn	Black Community Collaborative	Black Community Collaborative
Pat Doerr	Self	Self
Rhonda Patton	Chicago Citizen	South Side, Black Community, Black children in CPS
Rochelle Jackson	Resident	West Side, Black Community, Black children in CPS and their families, North Lawndale
Sabrina Scot	African International House USA Inc	Black community, Black children in CPS
Sonseriya Williams	None	Black Community, Black students in Chicago Public Schools and their families, South Side
Alicia M Campbel	Strong and Resilient Communities United	Strong and Resilient Communities United, Black Community, South Side, Black Children in CPS and their families

Christopher Teague	Knot Them Entertainment	Black community, Black children in CPS
Dianna C Long	Chicago Urban Art Retreat Center	Arts Community, West Side, North Lawndale
Jessica Jackson	Citizens of Chicago	Citizens of Chicago
kimberly sambou	Educator	Black Community, South Side, Black children in CPS and their families, CPS teachers
Robert Jones	None	Black community, South Side, Black children in CPS
Vivian C Brazil	None	Black Community, South Side, Children in CPS and their parents
Burma Box	Chicago Public Schools	Black educators, children and parents in Chicago Public Schools
Cherron Phillips	FJWILLIAMS Realty LLC	Black community, Black children in Chicago Public Schools, South Side
Dwayne Morris Truss	Community	None
Elizabeth haney	Retired cps teacher 37 years	Black Community, Black Students in Chicago Public Schools
Frantzie B Griffin	Bourdeau Griffin Design Center	Black community, South Side
Gilbert Villegas	City of Chicago	Chicagians in favor of a democratic process for electing school board members
Myles Brown	Urban Prep Academies	Black students in CPS
Sylvia Jones	None	Black community, CPS students and their families
Angelo Raphael Chavers	None	Black community, Black students in CPS
Anthony Crawford	70th and Prairie Block Club	Black community, South Side, Black students in CPS
Bridgett White	none	Southside, Black families that have been ignored and left out, people who fought for over 20 years to have this happen believing education can finally be equitable,
Carol James	None	Black children in CPS and their parents; Black Community, South Side
David Berry	None	Black community, Black children in CPS and their parents

Delmar Peterson	Great Expectations	Black children in CPS, Black Community, South Side
Elliott M Fourte	Cook County	Black Community, South Side
Jim Long	Illinois Policy	Illinois Policy
Lafayette Ford	Black United Fund of Illinois	Black United Fund of Illinois BUFI
Mrs Lawrence	None	Austin Community, West Side, Black children in CPS, Black community
Oddis O J Johnson	Voters for changes coalition of Illinois	Austin Community, Black Community, Black Students in CPS and their families, West Side
Rebecca Cook	The Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP	The Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP
Rene Taylor	Her Service Matters	Black Community, South Side, Black CPS students and their families
Tonetta L Guynn	None	Self
Vanessa A Harris	Strategy for Access	Black Community, Black CPS students and their families, South Side
Willie Cole	None	Black Community, Black students in CPS and their families, Black educators
Cata Truss	Austin CAC	Austin CAC
Harrietta Jackson	Voter	Black Community, CPS students and their families, South Side
Jacqueline Paige	National Housing Residents Association	Black Community, Black children in CPS and their families
Jessica Jackson	Citizens of Chicago	Black community, tax payers, Black children in CPS
Joycelyn Murdock	IAAFER	Black students in CPS and their families, Black community, West Side, Austin
Karl Brinson	The Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP	The Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP
Lynda Jam	None	Black students in CPS, the Black community
mansong kulubally	UNIA plus Some Positive People	Black community, Black students in CPS and their families
Michelle McDaniels	Not Applicable	Representing the Citizens, Voters, Taxpayers, Public School Parents and Students, with a particular emphasis on Black American Communities

Roland W Burris	None	Black community, South Side, Black students in CPS
Sacella M Smith	Synergistic Strategy & Development LLC	Black Community, Westside, Black students in CPS and their families
Tanjua Robinson	None	Black Community, Black children in Chicago, South Side
Tariq Finney	None	Black community, students in CPS, Southside
Valerie F Leonard	IAAFER	Black children in CPS and their parents, the Black Community, Black Voters
Arthur Dennis	None	Black community, South Side
H Demetrius Bonner	None	Black community, North Side, children in CPS and their parents
James Hutchinson	None	Black Community, South Side, Black children in CPS and their families
Joe Lucas	None	Black children in CPS, South Side
Madeline Sanders	None	Black community, Black children in CPS
Pearlie Bailey	None	Westside, Austin Community, Black Community, Black children in CPS and their parents
Sarah Hays	Retired	Black community, Black children in CPS and their families
Tiquita Brewer	None	Self
William Riley	SARCU	Black Communit
Cathaline Gray Carter	Retiree	Black Community, retired educators, Black CPS students and their families
Dennis Lacewell	Urban Prep Academies	Urban Prep Academies
Dr Renee Dickerson	None	Black community, Black children in CPS and their families
Jacqueline Reed	Every Block A Village	Black Community, Faith Community, Black children in CPS and their families, Black principals, Austin stakeholders, Westside
Mark Stevenson	The Frogs	Black community, Black theatrical professionals, South Side

Quentin Ellis	Quinia Properties LLC	Black community, South Side, Black students in Chicago
Stanley Thompson Sr	Retired	Black Community
Bricen Ward	Urban Prep Bronzeville	Black students in CPS
Joyce McEwen	None	Black Community, Black children in CPS
Nichelle Dunn	Chicago Public Schools	Black Community, Black CPS students and their families
Portia	Southshore park neighbors	Black community, South Side, Black children in CPS and their families
Sharon Lewis	Meadows Eastside	Black children in CPS and their families, South Side
Wilfred Gadsden	None	Black community, Black students in CPS and their families

Attachment B-1
Witness Slips for SB0015 (In the House)
Proponents

[SB0015](#)
[Senate Amendment 001](#)
[Bill Status](#)

Legislation: SB0015

Proponents: 8 | **Opponents: 19** | **No Position: 0**

Name	Firm, Business Or Agency	Representing
Hearing Date and Time: Executive (H) 3/6/2024 3:00 PM		
Andrea Kluger	Chicago Federation of Labor	Chicago Federation of Labor
Crystal Gardner	SEIU Local 73	SEIU Local 73
Sean Denney	Illinois Education Association	Illinois Education Association
Mike Ciaccio	City of Chicago	City of Chicago
Kurt Hilgendorf	Chicago Teachers Union	Chicago Teachers Union
Derek Blaida	Blaida and Associates LLC	City of Chicago
Frances Orenic	IL AFL-CIO	IL AFL-CIO
Nick Yelverton	Illinois Federation of Teachers	Illinois Federation of Teachers

Attachment B-2
Witness Slips for SB0015 (In the House)
Opponents

[SB0015](#)
[Senate Amendment 001](#)
[Bill Status](#)

Legislation: SB0015

Proponents: 8 **Opponents: 19** **No Position: 0**

Name	Firm, Business Or Agency	Representing
Hearing Date and Time: Executive (H) 3/6/2024 3:00 PM		
Gilbert Villegas	City of Chicago	Thousands of Chicago parents who want a fully elected school board and not a hybrid
Cata Truss	Austin CAC	Austin CAC
Rosita Chatonda	CAUSE Teachers	black children of Chicago
Stacy Davis Gates	Chicago Teacher's Union	Chicago Children
Barack Obama	Obama Foundation	Chicago Parents
Brian Iggins	Self	
Nicole Johnson	NA	
Anthony Crawford	Community	Community
Luisa Fernandez	Self	Self
CHRISTIAN FEAMAN	Parent	
Janet Fernandez	Parent	Parent, Student
Brian Mullins	Black American Voters Project	Black American Children
Dwayne Morris Truss	Community	Community
Raymond A Lopez	City of Chicago	
Chelsie Leffelman	Self	Self
Erica Dunn	Save Our Children	
Johnathon Bush	NA	
Natasha Dunn	Black Community Collaborative	Black Community Collaborative
Portia	South shore park neighbors	