



Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

March 13, 2024

Hon. J. B. Pritzker
Governor, State of Illinois
555 W. Monroe St., 16th Floor
Chicago, IL 60661

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Thank you for your support of the Chicago Elected Representative School Board and the Black Student Achievement Committee of the Chicago Board of Education. Because of your support, we are well on our way to giving Chicago voters control over the destiny of Chicago Public Schools and holding CPS accountable for eliminating the Black student achievement and opportunity gaps in the District.

IAAFER places a premium on governance structures that optimize voting rights and ballot access while maintaining accountability to the voters. Consistent with these values, we are strong proponents of a fully elected school board for Chicago, with all 20 board members being elected in November 2024. Our position has not changed, despite the fact that the Legislature has asked you to sign SB15 into law.

SB15 provides for a hybrid Board, for which the Mayor chooses the Board President and 10 board members, and the Voters get to elect 10 board members. It also increases the number of petition signatures required to be eligible to run for election to the Board. We respectfully request that you use your amendatory veto power to strengthen the bill as follows:

Provide for Equal Protection Under the Law For All Chicago Voters.

As it stands, SB15 includes an elaborate implementation plan to transition from a 7-member appointed Board of Education to a fully elected 21-member Board in 2 phases. In November 2024, we will have a hybrid board of which 10 members will be elected by Chicago Voters and the Mayor will select the Board President and 10 members.

In 2024, there will be 10 Districts, with each being subdivided into 2 districts. Each of the 10 districts will be represented by 2 people, one elected and 1 appointed by the Mayor. All voters will get to vote for a candidate to represent them in the District. If the winning candidate happens to live in Sub District A of a District, then the Mayor will select someone who lives in Sub District B of that District.

After the dust settles, half of Chicago Voters will have voted for someone to represent them at the District level who lives in their own Sub District. The other half of Chicago Voters will have voted for someone to represent them at the District level, who lives in another Sub District, while the Mayor appoints someone who lives in their Sub District. Clearly, not all Voters will have the same experience, which flies in the face of the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution.

It is clear to us, that in 2024, the purpose of these Sub Districts is not for the election or for representation, but to prevent competition among voters. We respectfully request that the 10 Districts be eliminated, and the 20 Sub Districts be used as electoral Districts instead. These smaller districts are more compact, and allow us to choose candidates that we know, like and trust.

If you choose the hybrid model, we strongly recommend that you amend SB15 to strike all references to the 20 Sub Districts in 2024. After all, the 20 Sub Districts will not be used for election or representation purposes until 2026. Let the candidates run in 10 districts in November 2024, and allow the Mayor to make his appointments after the election, without regard to where the candidates live. In 2026, the 10 Districts will be subdivided into 20, as prescribed in the current law. The solutions we described above are simpler for voters to understand, and do not pose the risk of a legal challenge.

Another reason to amend SB15 is the bill is extremely confusing. Our members have tried to discuss SB15 with a number of elected officials and their staff. There is no universal agreement as to Bill's intent. The prospect of an elected school board in Chicago should attract more voters to the polls. Unfortunately, the way this bill is written, we may end up with the opposite result. History has shown that public policies that are difficult to understand tend to minimize engagement and can lead to voter suppression. In summary, we respectfully request that you amend SB15 to provide for the election of all 20 districts in 2024. This is straightforward and mitigates the risks of a legal challenge.

Increase Ballot Access For Candidates

We are concerned that, as the enabling legislation for the Chicago Elected Representative School Board has evolved, the signature requirements for candidates have increased from 250 signatures initially to 500 signatures in November. SB15 increases the signature requirement to 1,000. It should be noted that in order to survive a petition challenge, it is best to get 3 to 4 times the required signature amounts. Obviously, candidates with access to money and an organized political apparatus would have no problem meeting these requirements. However, the average parent or typical resident might find these requirements to be onerous, if not prohibitive. The intent for this legislation from the start, has been to provide a mechanism for parents to have a real voice in the education of their children.

We also bring your attention to the fact that the signature requirement outlined in SB15 is higher than the signature requirement to run for Alderman and some Congressional seats in the Illinois Delegation. A typical Chicago Elected School Board District will have about 274,000 people. An Illinois Congressional district has about 750,000 people. We believe that a signature requirement of 500 provides ballot access to most candidates, while ensuring that we attract people who are serious about serving on the Chicago Elected Representative School Board.

In closing, we thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact Valerie F. Leonard at 773-571-3886 or valeriefleonard@msn.com.

Sincerely,

Illinois African Americans for Equitable Redistricting (IAAFER)

Valerie F. Leonard, Co-Founder, IAAFER
Karl Brinson, President, Chicago Westside NAACP
Lafayette Ford, Retired CPS Local School Council Specialist
Natasha Dunn, Founder and Executive Director, Black Community Collaborative
Brian Mullins, Founder, Black Voter Project
Dwayne Truss, Former Member, Chicago Board of Education, Founder, PACE
Craig Wimberly, President, Coalition of African American Leaders (COAL)

Attachment

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.

