



Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

Comments to the House Executive Committee November 8, 2023

My name is Valerie Leonard, Co-Founder of Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting (IAAFER). First, let me say thank you for including the Black Student Achievement Advisory Board in your most recent legislation. It is exhilarating to know that the Legislature is in support of closing the academic and opportunity gaps for Black children and their families. This landmark legislation will set the ball in motion to begin the hard work of removing barriers to Black student success in Chicago Public Schools. It is our sincerest hope and prayer that this committee and CPS stakeholders move the needle on some of our children's most entrenched problems, and provide a model for other school districts to do the same.

That being said, we are very disappointed that the hearing for the House Floor Amendment 1 to SB0689 was held earlier this afternoon with about an hour's notice, with no virtual option. Only 3 people submitted witness slips: a representative from the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), a lobbyist and me. I opposed the measure on behalf of IAAFER; the CTU representative was a proponent, and the lobbyist took no position. Both the CTU representative and lobbyist registered to speak and were in Springfield. I did not register to speak, as there was no virtual option. Nor was I notified in time to travel to Springfield. Clearly, three witness slips, with 3 different levels of support does not begin to allow you to put your finger on the pulse of the sentiment of Chicago voters. Unfortunately, this flies in the face of all the good work the Legislature put in heretofore to garner input from Chicago stakeholders. In sharp contrast, the Senate held a public hearing yesterday with a virtual option and a witness slips from a more diverse list of over 100 stakeholders from various communities throughout the City of Chicago.

We just learned that the House has just adopted House Floor Amendment 1 to SB0689, which:

Creates the Chicago Board of Education District Act. Divides the City of Chicago into 10 districts and 20 subdistricts for the purposes of identifying persons who will serve on the Chicago Board of Education. Amends the School Code.

Provides that, by December 14, 2024, the Mayor of the City of Chicago shall appoint a President of the Chicago Board of Education who shall serve a 2-year term. Provides that, until January 15, 2027, each district shall be represented by one member who is elected at the 2024 general election to a 2-year term and one member who is appointed by the Mayor by no later than December 16, 2024 to a 2-year term.

Requires each of the elected members to reside within the district that the member represents. Requires each of the appointed members to reside both within the district that the member represents and outside of the subdistrict within which the elected member of the district resides. Provides that, beginning January 15, 2027, each subdistrict shall be represented by one member who is elected at the 2026 general election. Specifies that, if a member is elected at the 2026 general election to fill the expired term of an appointed member, then the elected member shall serve a 2-year term. Specifies that, if a member is elected at the 2026 general election to fill the expired term of an elected member, then the member shall serve a 4-year term.

Requires each of the elected members to reside within the subdistrict that the member represents. Provides that, if a member is elected at the 2026 general election to serve a 2-year term, then the member elected at the 2028 general election shall serve a 4-year term, and, if a member is elected at the 2026 general election to serve a 4-year term, then the member elected in that subdistrict at the 2030 general election shall serve a 2-year term.

Provides that, beginning with the members elected at the 2032 general election, the members of each district shall serve two 4-year terms and one 2-year term for each 10-year period thereafter as determined by lot. Makes changes concerning: conflicts of interests of board members, eligibility of individuals to serve as board members, nominating petitions for board members, the creation of the Chicago Board of Education Black Student Achievement Advisory Board and other advisory bodies, and the creation and redistricting of subdistricts. Effective immediately.

We agree in principle that Chicago could be well-served by 10 districts with 2 subdistricts nested into each of the 10, with 1 elected school board representative and 1 appointed school board representative. However, we prefer the Senate's proposal, which has 20 districts effective immediately, with all districts hosting elections in 2024. The stagger would be created by having 10 districts electing their representatives for 2 year terms and 10 districts electing their representatives to 4 year terms. We are concerned by the fact that your proposal apparently precludes anyone from running for election who happens to also live in the same subdistrict of an appointee in 2024.

Your proposed amendment provides that *each elected member shall reside within the district that the member represents and each appointed member shall reside both within the district that the member represents and outside of the subdistrict within which the elected member of the district resides*. While this legislation is very well-intentioned, the unintended consequence seems to be, if we interpret this correctly, people who happen to live in the same subdistrict as an elected member are ineligible to be appointed to the Board of Education, and people who happened to live in the same subdistrict as an appointed person will be ineligible to run to represent the entire district in 2024. (We may or may not have interpreted this correctly) Because the appointments and elections will occur at about the same time, it may be difficult to know who the Mayor could appoint until after the election. The manner in which the legislation prescribes elections to occur is confusing, and could effectively protect incumbents from electoral competition.

Just as you made adjustments to keep half of Chicago voters from being effectively disenfranchised, we ask that you make adjustments so that all prospective candidates who want to run can do so. We recommend that this language is stricken to allow anyone who lives within a district to run, regardless of whether an appointee lives within the same subdistrict as a prospective candidate. If the 10 subdistricts are in effect for 2 years, then subdistrict "A" and subdistrict "B" should be inconsequential for the 2024 election. If, in 2026 both representatives reside in the same district, the candidate should make a personal decision as to whether or not to run against a fellow incumbent or move to run in another district. I believe this is the case when such conflicts are caused by redistricting.

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

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