



Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting

Comments to the Senate Executive Committee November 8, 2023

My name is Valerie Leonard, Co-Founder of Illinois African Americans For Equitable Redistricting. IAAFER supports the Senate Floor Amendment 1 to HB2233, which includes boundaries for the Chicago Elected Representative School Board, describes the election process and provides for the creation of the Black Student Achievement Committee of the Chicago Board of Education.

While we acknowledge that there is no perfect map, we believe that our original proposal, which included 10 districts using the Chicago wards as building blocks was a very innovative approach. It provided for 2 school board officials with 5 aldermen each; and encouraged collaboration among elected officials from City Council and the Board of Education so that they could be laser focused on developing solutions and providing resources for local schools in their districts. Our proposal kept communities together and was in compliance with the VRA and other laws governing creation of maps. We called our map the fairest of them all, because it gave every voter in Chicago the opportunity to elect candidates of choice, regardless of race, where they lived or their district. Our map created 3 majority Black districts; 3 majority white districts; 3 majority Latino districts and 1 majority minority district. These districts also provided opportunities for members of the Asian and Jewish communities to elect candidates of choice and collaborate within their communities.

Our proposal also called for the creation of the Chicago Board of Education Black Student Achievement Committee to close the academic and opportunity gaps that exist for Black CPS students and their families.

While our map was not accepted, we acknowledge that the State's most recent proposal represents a significant improvement over the first and second versions of the map. The districts are more compact, and were apparently drawn to optimize opportunities for minority groups to elect representatives of choice. There are 7 majority Black districts; 6 majority Latino districts; 5 majority White districts and 2 coalition districts in which two or more minority groups could work together to elect candidates of choice.

The Legislature amended the law, which previously called for the creation of 10 electoral districts in 2024 with 2 representatives each, one of which would be elected and the other would be appointed. The current draft legislation calls for the creation of 20 subdistricts, with 10 of them holding an election for 4-year terms in 2024, with 10 subdistricts having their representatives appointed by the Mayor. In 2026, the 10 subdistricts with appointed representatives will host elections. This will create staggered terms, with half the Chicago Board of Education being elected every two years. The districts that will host elections in 2024 are proportionate to the racial make

up of the districts. That is, 4 of 7 Black districts; 3 of 6 Latino districts, and 3 of the remaining white/plurality white districts will sit for an election.

We are in a situation in which there is a significant disparity in the racial makeup of our schools population and the city's racial makeup. Some are advocating for the districts to mirror the population of our city, as prescribed by the apportionment clause of the Constitution. Others are advocating that the districts be drawn to mirror the school population to ensure equity. While this is a very noble goal, it is not constitutional..

It is clear that the State Legislature did what they could, within the limits of the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection under the law and 1 man one vote convention to find a solution that would address as many outstanding issues with the map as possible. This included drawing 20 districts of equal population, rather than 10 and using various combinations of majority-minority, coalition and influence districts. There is no perfect map. While we would have drawn a different map, we don't believe in throwing out the baby with the dirty bathwater. We support the Legislature's latest mapping proposal.

An issue that we do find problematic is the fact that only half the Chicago voters will get to choose their representative in 2024. The rest will have to wait until 2026. Although you have changed the language in the bill to read subdistricts rather than electoral districts to provide greater flexibility, this does not lessen the effect of half the electorate feeling they have been disenfranchised. We recommend that, given that you will be going to 20 districts immediately that all districts should be up for election, with half of the terms being 2 years, and the other half being 4 years.

We were pleased to see that you included the Black Student Achievement Committee as a standing committee of the Chicago Board of Education, and we thank you for seeing the urgency of closing the Black student achievement and opportunity gap in a manner that is methodical and evidence-based. We realize that the barriers to Black student achievement and opportunity are entrenched and didn't occur over night. This committee is structured to do the real work, over the long term and move the needle.

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

Valerie F. Leonard

Co-Founder, IAAFER

773-571-3886

valeriefleonard@msn.com