




IN RE: PENDING SCHOOL BOARD LEGISLATION

SENATE HEARING

DATE:

April 17, 2023

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IN RE: PENDING SCHOOL BOARD LEGISLATION

SENATE HEARING

WITNESSES: BRENT HAMLET
MIRIAM BHIMANI
CASSIE CRESWELL
JEFF JENKINS
GRACE CHAN-MCKIBBEN
NICOLE JEANINE JOHNSON
CASSANDRA KACZOCHA
MAGGIE HOOPER CULLERTON
ROUSEMARY VEGA
SHLOMO SOROKA
CLIFFORD HELM
MARC KAPLAN
CATHERINE FRANCIS
VALERIE LEONARD
WILLIE COLE
DWAYNE TRUSS
NATASHA DUNN
TAWANA WATTS
DR. CARMEN PALMER
ANGIE LOBO
SONAM MOHINDRA
YOLANDA WILLIAMS
RICKY GHANDI
JITU BROWN
ROSITA CHATONDA
JODIE CANTRELL
TINA AUGUSTUS

DATE: APRIL 17, 2023

REPORTER: VICTORIA JADICK

APPEARANCES

SENATORS:

Kimberly Lightford, Leader

Robert F. Martwick, Vice-Chair

Omar Aquino, Member

Mattie Hunter, Member

Ram Villivalam, Member

Celina Villanueva, Member

Also Present: Ashley Jenkins, Clerk

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STIPULATION

The SENATE HEARING was taken at CHURCHILL COURT REPORTING, 110 NORTH WACKER DRIVE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60606 on MONDAY the 17TH day of APRIL 2023 at 6:21 p.m. (CT); said SENATE hearing was taken pursuant to the ILLINOIS Rules of Civil Procedure.

1 PROCEEDINGS

2
3 MR. HORELED: Ashley, I think you're muted.

4 CLERK: Thank you. Leader, I was telling the
5 people in the room to turn off their speaker.
6 Just give me one sec. Testing. All right. We are
7 waiting on one more to connect and then I think
8 we'll be ready to get started. Leader, we have two
9 other folks. I'm going to e-mail you those.

10 MS. LIGHTFORD: I can't tell if I can see
11 better with my glasses or not. That's funny.
12 Oh, my god. Aging is rough.

13 CLERK: I am going to let everyone in, make an
14 announcement before we go live. That was for LAS,
15 before we start rolling. I'll let you know when we
16 can get rolling. I am going to go ahead and --
17 okay. Letting everybody in now. Good afternoon or
18 good evening. Thank you for your patience. We will
19 be -- begin the hearing and begin streaming
20 momentarily. Please mute yourself until you are
21 asked to speak. Please stay on mute until you are
22 called to speak. There are numerous people seeking
23 testimony today. We want to make sure there is no
24 background noise and so that everyone is -- has an
25 appropriate opportunity to be heard. Thank you for

1 your cooperation. LAS, I think we are good to go.
2 Leader Lightford?

3 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Good evening. The
4 Special Committee on the Chicago Elected
5 Representative School Board shall come to order.
6 Will the clerk please call roll?

7 CLERK: Lewis? McConchie? Villanueva?

8 MS. VILLANUEVA: Here.

9 CLERK: Villivalam?

10 MR. VILLIVALAM: Here.

11 CLERK: Sims? Hunter?

12 MS. HUNTER: Here.

13 CLERK: Aquino?

14 MR. AQUINO: Here.

15 CLERK: Martwick?

16 MR. MARTWICK: I'm here.

17 CLERK: Chair Lightford?

18 MS. LIGHTFORD: Present.

19 CLERK: There are six members present.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. There're being six
21 members present, we shall proceed to conduct
22 business. The following credential media seek leave
23 of the committee to take photos and videos of the
24 proceedings. BlueRoomStream seeks leave to video
25 record. Seeing no objection, leave is granted.

1 I'd like to begin this evening by thanking you-all
2 for coming on to our fifth meeting of the Senate
3 Special Committee and so glad to see so much
4 participation. We welcome you on behalf of the
5 Chicago Elected Representative School Board Special
6 Committee. We've had several hearings throughout
7 the city over the last few weeks and our goal with
8 this online hearing was to provide another way for
9 the public to participate in this process. Before
10 we begin, I'd like to provide some information
11 that's very important. In 2021, the Senate and the
12 House passed House Bill 2908, a measure I was proud
13 to sponsor, which requires the Chicago Board of
14 Education to become fully elected by 2027. Starting
15 January 15th of 2025, a two-year hybrid period
16 begins, with ten members being elected to four-year
17 terms, ten members being appointed by the mayor to
18 two-year terms, and the board president being
19 appointed by the mayor for a two-year term.
20 In 2027, when the mayor appointed terms expire, the
21 ten members and the elected at large members will be
22 elected to four-year terms. The general assembly
23 must comply to the July 1, 2023, deadline to draw
24 Chicago school board districts. Based on Chicago's
25 population, the ten districts -- the ten districts

1 will be comprised of approximately 137,301 persons.
2 According to the census, the city of Chicago is 35.9
3 percent white, 29.8 percent Hispanic, 29.2 percent
4 Black, and 7 percent Asian, and about 11 percent
5 describes themselves as two or more races. The
6 school code requires that the districts be compact,
7 contiguous, and substantially equal in population
8 and consistent with the Illinois Voting Rights Act.
9 If you know someone who wants to provide input or
10 could not make it to today -- to tonight's Zoom
11 meeting, we encourage you to spread the word about
12 our website, www.ilsenateredistricting.com. That's
13 I-L for Illinois Senate, S-E-N-A-T-E-,
14 Redistricting, R-E-D-I-S-T-R-I-C-T-I-N-G,.com where
15 there is a page dedicated to implementing new
16 Chicago school board districts. At that webpage,
17 anyone can draw intimate proposed committees of
18 interest -- communities of interests, and upload
19 district boundaries. Soon, members of the public
20 will also be able to draw their own district
21 boundaries as well. All maps submitted through the
22 portal will be reviewed as part of the public
23 record. On a personal note, I am so proud to help
24 lead this process, which is a continuation of my
25 life's work to improve education for children, not

1 just in Chicago, but across Illinois. I fought to
2 make sure our students have the most qualified
3 teachers, provide nutritious food at schools,
4 prevent bullying and violence on school grounds,
5 and a ensure Black and brown children have the same
6 access to education as everyone else. These
7 hearings are the start of an exciting new era and
8 community led education that would empower families
9 to elect leaders who reflect their neighborhoods.
10 With so much at stake, it will not be easy to
11 balance various desires and perspectives, but we are
12 committed to uplifting voices that too often go
13 unheard and crafting a product our city can be proud
14 of. I'd now like to go to Vice-Chair Martwick and
15 then Vice-Chair Aquino for additional comments.
16 Vice-Chair Martwick?

17 MR. MARTWICK: Thank you, Madam Chair. These
18 hearings have been incredibly informative and really
19 are a testament to the advocacy efforts of the
20 community groups, parents, students --

21 MS. LIGHTFORD: Your mute is on, Senator
22 Martwick. Senator Martwick, your mute button is on.
23 Can someone close to Senator Martwick let him know
24 that his -- we cannot hear him. Senator Martwick,
25 we unfortunately, did not hear your testimony. Your

1 mute button was set. If you wouldn't mind unmuting
2 and there you go. Start all over again, Senator
3 Martwick.

4 MR. MARTWICK: I looked really good while I was
5 doing it though, so --

6 MS. LIGHTFORD: Fantastic.

7 MR. MARTWICK: Thank you, Madam Chair. And
8 with that, I wanted to say these hearings have been
9 incredibly informative and are -- truly are a
10 testament to the advocacy efforts of the community
11 groups, the parents, the students who fought so long
12 to have a greater say in how our schools are run and
13 that say, should and does include input on what
14 these new school boundaries should look like.
15 I'm so proud to have sponsored the legislation that
16 created this elected school board in Chicago, but
17 clearly our work is not done. Our neighborhood
18 schools are facing incredible challenges. During
19 these hearings, we've heard about the need to
20 increase violence prevention initiatives and improve
21 transportation. We've heard about facilities that
22 need to be repaired and expanded, and we've heard
23 calls to address longstanding inequalities in how
24 resources are allocated, and that's why this process
25 is so important. We simply cannot continue the

1 status quo. So with that, I want to say thank you
2 to all of those who have fought to get us to this
3 point. As I said, we have more work to do, but this
4 is an important step forward for accountability and
5 community involvement in our schools. I hope
6 you-all heard that this time. And with that, I will
7 turn it over to Vice- Chair Aquino for remarks.
8 Thank you very much.

9 MR. AQUINO: Thank you, Chair Lightford and
10 Vice-Chair Martwick. As we've discussed over the
11 last several weeks, we are facing a once in a
12 generation opportunity to chart a new path forward
13 for our children and our communities. For too long,
14 the Latinx -- Latine neighborhoods have struggled
15 with this investment, particularly in our schools,
16 where teachers are constantly being asked to do more
17 with less. We've seen the results of that approach;
18 larger class sizes, overworked teachers, struggling
19 students who are denied the tools needed to succeed
20 in life. An elected school board will provide our
21 communities with greater accountability, a way to
22 hold CPS leaders responsible for the decisions that
23 impact our children and our neighborhoods. The
24 future of our city relies on us getting this right
25 and these hearings help ensure marginalized voices

1 are heard throughout the process. We must
2 have -- excuse me, we must have an effective school
3 board for all. Thank you.

4 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Senator Aquino.
5 Senator McConchie, would you like to add anything
6 for tonight's testimony? Okay. I don't know that
7 I see Senator McConchie on. So I -- with that,
8 I would like to thank you again to those who took
9 time to join us this evening and I look forward to
10 hearing today's testimonies. We do have over
11 30 individuals speaking, and we're up to about
12 34 now seeking to testify today, so we really
13 appreciate your patience and your efficiency moving
14 forward. And while I know passions may run high,
15 I urge witnesses to please stick to the topic at
16 hand as we focus on a successful implementation of
17 this transition. And with that in mind, I welcome
18 Shlomo Soroka to the microphone, Augudath Israel of
19 Illinois. If I chop up anyone's name, my apologies.
20 Just please state it for the record.

21 CLERK: I don't think that Shlomo has joined us
22 at the moment.

23 MS. LIGHTFORD: Okay.

24 CLERK: Maybe we can go on to the next one.

25 MS. LIGHTFORD: Okay. Okay. Next person will

1 be Brent Hamlet, Horizons for Youth. Is Brent
2 available?

3 MR. HAMLET: I'm here. I -- I'm sorry.
4 I'm kind of looking at my laptop, and looking
5 (Inaudible). For some reason, my Zoom wasn't working
6 on my laptop, but that's okay. You-all can hear me
7 okay, right?

8 MS. LIGHTFORD: Yes. Brent, you just spent
9 about 20 seconds of your testimony. Come on.

10 MR. HAMLET: Okay. I'm sorry. Members of the
11 committee and the Chicago Elected School Board,
12 thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
13 My name is Brent Harry Hamlet. As I already
14 mentioned, I am the middle school program manager at
15 Horizons for Youth in the West Loop neighborhood.
16 Senator Lightford, I agree that reaching equity
17 through the elected school board should be the
18 committee's top priority. I am here today to
19 request that the state legislator implement an
20 equitable elected school board structure and fair
21 election process. Reduce the class size -- excuse
22 me, reduce the size of the Chicago Elected School
23 Board. More board members does not mean more
24 effective. It just means it will be more of --
25 expensive to run. An unusually large school board

1 will create more unnecessary bureaucratic waste
2 taking funding from schools to provide resources for
3 board members. Now, why would we spend millions of
4 dollars that could otherwise be invested in our
5 students? We should be compensating board members
6 because it is a 40-hour week job. The only people
7 who can donate their time and energy are people of
8 considerable individual wealth or candidates with
9 the backing of special interests. Establish campaign
10 finance rules in order for the school board to be
11 made up of everyday parents, educators, and
12 community members. There needs to be limits on
13 money received for campaigns. We need to ensure a
14 fair election process to ensure that working class
15 citizens can run against the small percentage of
16 Chicagoans who have the means to buy a seat on the
17 board, including non-citizen voting rights in the
18 electoral process. 89 percent of Chicago public
19 school students are students of color. Parents of
20 these students know that they need most and deserve
21 an equal voice in who represents their child's
22 education. Not including non-citizen voting rights
23 includes a high percentage of the stakeholders whose
24 students are enrolled in Chicago Public Schools,
25 reduce the size of the Chicago Elected School Board.

1 An equitably structured school board would bring
2 together voices who take the job seriously.
3 Compensation is essential for a true representation
4 of the board. Established campaign finance rules
5 and equitably elected school boards would move the
6 needle on the opportunity gap between high needs and
7 affluent schools. Include non-citizen voting
8 rights in the electoral process. Lastly, an
9 equitably school -- elected school board is more
10 likely to represent and prioritize the needs of the
11 students it serves over the small percentage of
12 Chicagoans who have the means to campaign for seat
13 on the board. Structural inequities across
14 Chicagoland are putting our most vulnerable students
15 at risk and the state needs to do everything in its
16 power to put an end to it. This is why I am urging
17 the Senate Special Committee to restructure the ESB
18 and implement a fair election process to fairly
19 govern Chicago public schools with equity. Waiting
20 is no longer an option. Thank you for your time.

21 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Mr. Hamlet. Our
22 next presenter will be Larry Wilson Junkins.
23 Mr. Jenkins, are you on? Okay. I don't see that he
24 is. The next guest would be Miriam Bhimani.

25 MS. BHIMANI: You got it. Miriam Bhimani.

1 MS. LIGHTFORD: Hi, Ms. Bhimani.

2 MS. BHIMANI: Can you hear me?

3 MS. LIGHTFORD: I can, Miriam. Welcome. Please
4 proceed.

5 MS. BHIMANI: Thank you. My name is Miriam
6 Bhimani. I'm here representing a group called The
7 FOIA Bakery. We are a group of researchers who
8 focus on public education. We include researchers
9 who are experienced in policy creation, civic tech,
10 program compliance and evaluation. In addition to
11 the legal criterion, we've drafted additional first
12 principles for the school board maps. The district
13 should have substantially equal number of CPS-
14 attending children residing in the district.
15 Students who attend Chicago public schools are not
16 equally distributed across the city. The school
17 board is charged with administering CPS public
18 resources, which should mirror where students
19 reside. CPS ARA data shows distribution of CPS and
20 charter school enrolled students. It is extremely
21 typical for students to travel outside their
22 neighborhoods for school. Their experiences should
23 be reflected across the mapped districts. CPS uses
24 a portfolio system for student assignment, which
25 includes magnet schools, selective enrollment

1 schools, trade schools, and other schools that do
2 not have attendance boundaries. We should consider
3 where students reside prior to considering where
4 they are enrolled. Furthermore, CPS retains the
5 discretion to change its student assignment policies
6 at any time. Therefore, the elected district should
7 be much more tightly coupled to where students
8 actually live. Additionally, for evaluation
9 criteria of the districts, we should not construct
10 districts from existing attendance boundaries.
11 However, we should use existing attendance
12 boundaries to evaluate lopsided representation from
13 one school community. Again, attendance boundaries
14 are subject to board control. This will have -- if
15 we use them for districts, it will have the effect
16 of making those attendance boundaries much more
17 rigid. Chicago Public Schools maintains a data set
18 which counts how many students within a school
19 boundary attend that bounded school and how many
20 students come from outside a neighborhood attendance
21 boundary. Most students in CPS are not attending
22 their neighborhood school. Some attendance
23 boundaries are the result of problematic historical
24 decisions based on race, class, or politics. Making
25 them an explicit building block unintentionally

1 reinforces those patterns. Additionally, there are
2 many places in the city where the closest school is
3 not the zoned school, creating attention between
4 attendance boundaries and compact geographic
5 community areas. I'll be happy to submit the data
6 sets I've referenced in written comments to the
7 committee. Thank you.

8 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Miriam. The next
9 individual will be Cassie Creswell, Illinois
10 Families for Public Schools. Cassie, welcome.

11 MS. CRESWELL: Hello. I'm Cassie Creswell,
12 director of Illinois Families for Public Schools and
13 a CPS parent. Thank you, Chair Lightford and the
14 Committee for holding hearings on this topic. The
15 legislation that created the elected representative
16 school board for Chicago was the work of,
17 essentially, a generation of community organizing
18 against those mostly exceedingly wealthy individuals
19 in the business community who opposed self-
20 determination and self-governance for the public
21 schools of our city. An elected representative
22 school board was extremely popular with Chicago
23 voters when was on the ballot in referenda in 2012
24 and 2015. A strong, well-resourced public school
25 system benefits all Chicagoans, whether we have

1 school-aged children or not, because public schools
2 are a foundational element in a thriving,
3 pluralistic democracy. Our org is strongly in favor
4 of the structure of the school board as it stands
5 currently in statute with 21 members, 20 of those
6 elected from districts. The size of the board was
7 discussed and negotiated extensively over many years
8 in multiple general assemblies. More districts mean
9 smaller district, which make campaigns less
10 expensive and more accessible to grassroots
11 candidates. Given the racial, ethnic, and class
12 segregation in the city and the composition of the
13 electorate, smaller districts also mean a board that
14 is more representative of the city and the school
15 district's student body demographics, and smaller
16 districts mean board members who are more accessible
17 to their constituents, including public school
18 families. Dividing the city into 20 districts means
19 one elected member representing around 130,000
20 constituents. Here's some relevant comparisons.
21 Other school boards in Illinois almost all have
22 seven members, but 90 percent of those board's
23 districts are very small, with fewer than 4,500
24 students. That's less than just the largest single
25 CPS high school. Elgin U-46 is the second-largest

1 district in the state. There are 160,000 registered
2 voters in that district electing their board, about
3 35,000 students. That's about a tenth of the size
4 of Chicago. It has a seven-member elected board.
5 About half our property taxes in Chicago are a
6 controlled by the Chicago Board of Education.
7 We have 50 alderman and a mayor to levy and allocate
8 the portion that goes to the city. Cook County
9 Board has 17 members and a president with an
10 operating budget roughly similar to that of CPS.
11 A board with fewer than 20 elected districts will
12 not be sufficient to serve our city's needs. Lastly
13 though, these are not the subject matter of the
14 hearing, we have three other requests to the general
15 assembly. Local school councils, though they're
16 not a substitute for an elected representative
17 board, are a crucial governance structure in their
18 own right, and increasing involvement in LSC
19 elections and operations is a way to strengthen
20 individual schools, and the district as a whole,
21 during this time of governance transition. Board
22 member compensation, we urge the general assembly to
23 pass legislation to pay board members. These
24 elected board members will be responsible for
25 levying and spending billions of dollars of revenue,

1 for educating hundreds of thousands of Chicago
2 children, and for representing 130,000 constituents
3 each, including students, families, teachers,
4 taxpayers, and voters. Making this an unpaid
5 position also limits who can serve. And let us note
6 that in a district of more than 40,000 employees,
7 the difference between paying fewer than 21 board
8 members versus 21 or more is minimal and a spurious
9 argument for decreasing the board size. Finally,
10 campaign financing. We urge the general assembly to
11 address the cost of elections by creating some
12 mechanism for public financing of campaigns. This
13 exists around the country and various jurisdictions
14 and various forms. Hand ringing about how expensive
15 elections will be has been continuous since the
16 earliest discussions of an elected board.

17 Legislators now need to tackle this problem and
18 there are plenty of precedents out there to draw on.
19 Thank you so much for your time.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Cassie. The next
21 guest is Jeff Jenkins, Illinois Families for Public
22 Schools.

23 MR. JENKINS: Hello.

24 MS. LIGHTFORD: Hi, Jeff.

25 MR. JENKINS: I just want to speak about one

1 issue and that's compensation for board members.
2 I absolutely agree with you, Speaker Lightford, that
3 we want to -- we want to empower families to elect
4 board members who reflect their communities, but
5 that's not going to be possible for a lot of
6 communities -- a lot of working-class communities,
7 when you're asking board members to volunteer their
8 time. I would also agree with Senator Aquino. This
9 is a once in a lifetime opportunity, and we're
10 consistently asking teachers to do more with less.
11 But now, you are asking democratically elected board
12 members to do more with nothing. Nothing at all.
13 And I believe that we're -- are going to limit the
14 amount of people and the quality of people who can
15 run. It'll be similar to our -- the appointed
16 boards that we have been -- we have been working
17 to -- to replace for decades, where its people of
18 means. CEOs, high-wealth individuals, those are the
19 only people who can volunteer that kind of time. I
20 have two public school kids. I've spent countless
21 hours volunteering. I spent eight years on my LSC.
22 I understand to a certain degree how much time you
23 have to put into advocating for your -- for your
24 neighborhood public schools. And now you're asking
25 parents to spend even more time tackling issues that

1 appointed board members, people with -- with really
2 solid financial backing weren't able to do. I just
3 believe it is completely unfair that you're asking
4 board members to volunteer their time. None of
5 the -- none of the elected officials on this meeting
6 are volunteering their time. They're all
7 compensated fully. They have compensation for their
8 staff. They have per diem for travel, per diem for
9 meal, per diem for housing. They get extra
10 compensation for being on committees and chairing
11 committees, and asking individuals to volunteer
12 their time to be part of an elected school board,
13 the first one in generations in Chicago, I believe,
14 is -- is really shortsighted, deeply shortsighted.
15 I think we're going to end up with high-wealth
16 individuals with the backing of -- similar to the
17 folks who put the high-wealth individuals on our
18 previous boards. That's what we're going to end up
19 with. It's -- it's really unfair, so I -- I really
20 urge the general assembly to -- to amend this bill
21 and to appropriately compensate the individuals who
22 are going to serve on this board. We have a very
23 similar situation with our district councils. We
24 have -- we elected 66 district council members here
25 in the city of Chicago and they are all being

1 compensated a \$500 stipend, because that's very
2 difficult work, to be a liaison between the
3 community and the Chicago Police Department. \$500
4 compensation for that. But you're asking 21 board
5 members to take on this incredibly difficult task,
6 and you're asking them to do it for free. I'm
7 sorry, but as someone who spent decades advocating
8 for an elected school board, I believe it's a bit of
9 a slap in the face to public school parents.

10 Thank you.

11 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Jeff. The next
12 individual will be Grace Chan-McKibben, Coalition
13 for a Better Chinese American Community.

14 MS. CHAN-MCKIBBEN: Thank you, Leader
15 Lightford. My name is Grace Chan-McKibben. I'm the
16 executive director of the Coalition for a Better
17 Chinese American Community, or CBCAC for short.
18 CBCAC is a policy, advocacy, and community planning
19 organization based in Chicago's Chinatown. I'm here
20 to testify in support of the School district map
21 drawn by Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago,
22 to advocate for four school districts that will keep
23 the Asian American communities in Chicago together
24 and amplify the voice of Asian American residents,
25 students, and parents in the city. As you know, the

1 census 2020 showed that Asian Americans were the
2 fastest growing group in the city of Chicago,
3 growing from 144,000, almost 145,000 in 2010, to
4 roughly 190,00 in 2020, which is a staggering 31
5 percent increase. Asian Americans now make up 7
6 percent of the city's 2.7 million residents, and in
7 Chicago's public schools, the Asian American student
8 population is around 6.6 percent, roughly mirroring
9 this city's percentage. The Asian American
10 population is concentrated in several clusters, and
11 as you'll see the presentation by some of my other
12 friends from Asian Americans Advancing Justice who
13 would testify later, that the four areas that Asian
14 Americans Advancing Justice Chicago's proposing will
15 all keep Asian American communities whose residents
16 have shared interest and shared high school
17 boundaries together so that they can have an elected
18 school board representative that represents their
19 values. I will focus a little bit more on the area
20 with the highest concentration of Asian Americans in
21 Chicago, because that's the where I've worked for
22 the past 15 years. In 2010 CBCAC, my organization
23 was the lead organization for state-level
24 redistricting that created a state representative
25 district that included 90 percent of the Asian

1 Americans in this area, and thus focusing the Asian
2 American voice and uplifting the needs and interests
3 of a community that had previously been relatively
4 invisible in the public arena. And last year, CBCAC
5 again was the lead organization that together with
6 many partner organizations, many of whom are
7 represented tonight, successfully advocated for the
8 creation of the first ever Asian American majority
9 city ward. The new 11th ward is now 51 percent
10 Asian American. The southern most district drawn by
11 our partner organization, Asian Americans Advancing
12 Justice Chicago, includes Chinatown and Bridgeport,
13 and that includes census blocks that range from 30
14 percent to 90 percent Asian Americans, the highest
15 concentration of Asian Americans in the city of
16 Chicago. And that extends to Bronzeville to the
17 east and McKinley Park to the west and Brighton Park
18 a little bit further. From Chinatown to Bridgeport
19 to McKinley Park has long been referred to as the
20 greater Chinatown area by my organization and other
21 Chinatown organizations for the past couple of
22 decades. The Asian American population continues to
23 extend west along the Archer bus route into Brighton
24 Park to the west. So Kelly High School in Brighton
25 Park has the highest concentration of Asian

1 Americans than any neighborhood high school and
2 several neighborhood elementary schools in district
3 -- in this district, namely Haines, Healy, Ward, and
4 Holden, have high percentages of Asian American
5 students. Asian American families have specific
6 needs in language access and immigrant services, and
7 we urge that the committee takes into consideration
8 the four Asian American plurality districts that are
9 proposed so that Asian American families who have
10 long been marginalized in the US and in Chicago can
11 have their needs met and their voices heard. Thank
12 you.

13 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Nicole Jeanine
14 Johnson, the Lotus Lair.

15 MS. JOHNSON: Good evening, everybody. Thank
16 you for this, and I'm honored to be here. My name
17 is Nicole Jeanine Johnson. I'm a Chicago public
18 school graduate, graduating from Beasley Academic
19 Center and Whitney M. Young Magnet High School.
20 I'm a classroom teacher and resident of the
21 Englewood community. I'm a first-generation college
22 student, having earned degrees from the world's best
23 institutions like the University of Michigan,
24 National Lewis University here in Chicago, and the
25 University of Pennsylvania. I am also,

1 unfortunately, an exception. In middle school,
2 I walked to the school bus with a -- a young man who
3 lived across the street from me. He was a few years
4 younger than me. Our paths and our fates separated
5 when I went off to high school. Today, I'm a
6 successful entrepreneur, author, and public servant
7 having run for office here in this city, and he is
8 probably somewhere in jail or laying low. Every
9 summer, him and his friends attract danger to my
10 block that I once felt safe on while growing up.
11 I'm thankful that we are here to ensure that the
12 elected school board reflects the identities of
13 Chicago public school students, not necessarily the
14 city, but I want to ensure that we give special
15 designation and support to support Black students.
16 The images of this past weekend are tattooed on my
17 brain, like I'm sure many of you here on this call,
18 where Black Chicago teens were seeing bashing in the
19 windshield of someone's Tesla, mobbing CTA buses,
20 and randomly shooting into an open crowd. This is a
21 result of the failed system and lack of oversight on
22 their wellbeing. We can no longer afford to
23 legislate and special initiatives -- create special
24 initiatives in the name of Black and brown or BIPOC,
25 for I fear it has led to the death of so many Black

1 children. Similar to the Chicago Board of Education
2 Non-Citizen Advisory Board, I am in full support of
3 a standing advisory council just solely and wholly
4 focused on the success and achievement of Black
5 students here in the city of Chicago. This
6 committee could cover some, but this is not limited
7 to, Black student mental health, Black teacher
8 pipeline initiatives, Black student college and
9 career readiness, and CPS partnerships to feed
10 additional resources and support from various
11 Chicago institutions such as local hospitals, higher
12 education institutes, relevant nonprofits,
13 corporations, to ensure that the burden of the task
14 to support our children is not solely on the
15 school's teachers and leaders. In 2020, the private
16 sector made astounding promises and commitments to
17 Black lives. It's time that our government, city,
18 and legislators across the state do the same. Thank
19 you.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you for your testimony.
21 Katie Gruber, CPS Parents?

22 MS. GRUBER: Hello. Thank you, Senator
23 Lightford for -- can you hear me?

24 MS. LIGHTFORD: Yes.

25 MS. GRUBER: Great. My name is Katie Gruber

1 and I've been a CPS parent for the last 11 years.
2 My sons have attended Ray Elementary School and are
3 now students at Kenwood Academy here in Hyde Park.
4 I've served on the PTO and the LSC at Ray. I am
5 very much in favor of a 21-person board, because a
6 larger board will make it harder for well-funded
7 groups to use their resources to try and get their
8 preferred candidates elected. There's a lot at
9 stake here. Parents and community groups have
10 worked very hard to have their voices be heard.
11 Now that we are finally going to have an elected
12 board, we need to make sure that parents who
13 represent their community's priorities have a fair
14 shot at getting elected. The best way to do that is
15 to have more districts that are smaller. Not only
16 will this increase the probability that candidates
17 will be in closer touch with their constituents, but
18 it decreases the probability that these deep-
19 pocketed groups can run candidates and ads and
20 mailers in all the districts. Thank you.

21 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Now, this next name
22 Cassandra -- help me out, she's the vice president
23 for Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education.
24 Please state your name for the record.

25 MS. KACZOCHA: Hello, I'm Cassandra Kaczochoa.

1 Thank you for having me tonight. I am a parent of
2 two CPS students and the vice president of the board
3 for the family advocacy group, Raise Your Hand for
4 Public Education. After World War II, my
5 grandparents left the sharecropping plantations they
6 were raised on, migrating to Chicago for the hope of
7 a better future. Today, Chicago is a place where my
8 Black son faces graduating high school into the
9 widest racial gap in economic mobility in the
10 country. This gap in economic mobility isn't an
11 accident. It's the result of decades of policy that
12 created a system of resource apartheid for Black
13 families in Chicago. In Chicago public schools,
14 this resource apartheid is glaring. School closures
15 and racist hiring practices have ensured that Black
16 students are less likely to have tenured educators
17 who look like them, and Black families are more
18 likely to have to travel great distances to take our
19 children to school. The resource apartheid is also
20 evident when you look at the reading and math scores
21 and see that Black children's scores are both lowest
22 and have declined the most over the last few years
23 of pandemic schooling. As you draw the map for
24 Chicago's first ever democratically elected school
25 board, I urge you to center the population who has

1 most been harmed by Chicago Public Schools, and the
2 resource apartheid- creating policies enacted under
3 mayoral control. Please give voice to Black
4 communities who have watched our schools dismantled
5 and our ancestors' dreams defunded.

6 Ignore Kids First, Advance Illinois, and other
7 billionaire-backed voices who are urging you to
8 reduce the size of the board. Embrace this historic
9 chance to create the 21-member board that gives us
10 the best chance at equitable representation, and
11 give Black Chicago more opportunity to finally have
12 school leadership that seeks to do justice by the
13 generations of Black Chicagoans whom have been
14 harmed by our public school system. And finally, if
15 you consider any trailer bills, please consider
16 providing a stipend to board members in mandating
17 and funding the creation of a board committee
18 dedicated to improving Black student achievement.

19 Thank you.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Next, we will have
21 Maggie Hooper Cullerton. Raise Your Hand.

22 MS. CULLERTON HOOPER: Good evening.

23 MS. LIGHTFORD: Ms. Maggie? Oh, hi, Maggie.

24 MS. CULLERTON HOOPER: Hello. My name is
25 Maggie Cullerton Hooper, and my two children

1 currently attend Hibbard Elementary School in Albany
2 Park. I was born and raised in Chicago, but
3 attended Saint Clements and Saint Ignatius. I was
4 raised with every imaginable privilege, and I
5 reflect one side, the white affluent North Side
6 version of the Tale of Two Cities narrative of
7 Chicago that we so often hear. As many of you know,
8 I grew up with access to political power, was raised
9 to value public service and to form my own opinions,
10 and to advocate for what I believe to be just.
11 I would like to urge this committee to listen to the
12 Black and Latine parents and students in the CPS
13 system. Many Black and Latine-led organizations
14 have publicly shared a consistent and unified policy
15 agenda for this board of education. Please do not
16 consider reducing the size the board. Please
17 consider a map that does not over- represent the
18 white population of CPS. Most of us already have
19 access to power and our voices heard. A smaller
20 board means larger districts, less representation,
21 and less equity. It will mean that, yet again,
22 the white stakeholders, only ten percent of the CPS
23 population, will have outsized -- outsized voice.
24 This, in addition to the power imbalance that is
25 already prevalent in our city. Please draw the maps

1 in a way that ensures the most Black representation
2 possible. Please ensure that non-citizen residents
3 are able to vote in electing of the board, and
4 please draft restrictive campaign finance rules that
5 limit spending dramatically. My only other request
6 would be about the hearings. I'm not sure if this
7 is accurate, but I have not seen a hearing conducted
8 in Spanish made available. If it would be possible
9 to host at least one more hearing in Spanish
10 language, I think that that would be really helpful
11 to a lot of the critical stakeholders in CPS, at
12 least in my community, where there is a -- a large
13 number of folks that are not English speakers. Thank
14 you very much.

15 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Maggie. Our next
16 individual will be Marian Patton, also from Raise
17 Your Hand. Is Marian on? Okay. How about -- I
18 believe this is Rousemary Vega from Raise Your Hand.

19 MS. VEGA: The one and only. Thank you very
20 much. Thank you, thank you, for taking your time to
21 hear us out. I'm a little bit nervous. You know,
22 this is triggering for me. We went to a lot of
23 hearings, but hello, my name is Rousemary Vega.
24 I am a parent of two CPS students and a parent
25 organizer with Raise Your Hand. In 2013, my

1 children's school, Lafayette Elementary, was closed.
2 To CPS, this was just another building, but to my
3 family, it was a devastation in full effect.
4 Everything was being snatched from under our nose
5 and fast. I had no idea who to turn to. As a
6 parent, I was lost. I never knew that the Board of
7 Education existed, and when I did, it was too late.
8 Not because I'm stupid, but because we had no proper
9 representation for Black and brown children or
10 parents. People have never seen in our lives, in our
11 schools, or in our communities, were deciding that
12 Lafayette was underutilized and needed to be closed.
13 The school house, a community of 97 percent Black
14 and brown low- income students, with more 50 percent
15 with special needs and disability, Lafayette had one
16 of the largest string orchestras in Chicago. So you
17 see, Lafayette was our safe place. Our children
18 needed resources and representation, not to be
19 pushed out or punished. There was no information
20 given, nor did anyone have answers to our questions.
21 We pleaded endlessly, and with no one to hold
22 accountable, they got away with the injustice and
23 the discrimination to our children. For the past
24 ten years, I have fought alongside and organized
25 with parents, activists, and organizations for an

1 elected school board. We did this in freezing
2 temperatures, too. Not an easy task, but it was
3 worth every freezing finger to get it on the ballot.
4 And we won. We won ten seats. And I'm sorry, we
5 knew this needed to be done. The -- the appointed
6 board hated our children, and their actions spoke so
7 much louder than what they were saying. We needed
8 to get this done and we got it done. There are so
9 many things that we can ask to make this right,
10 but here are a few suggestions and we hope you
11 listen, because the appointed board was damaging to
12 Black and brown families and our students. When I
13 finally found that the Board of Education, as a
14 parent who was hurt, who was desperate to keep my
15 school closed -- I mean open from closing, they
16 didn't allow me to speak. They didn't allow me to
17 show my emotions. They didn't allow me to show my
18 anger. I had no one to turn to. They banned me as
19 a parent for five years from speaking. I had no one
20 to hold accountable. And I ask you Lightford, and I
21 ask you-all, Omar Aquino, to please do what's right
22 for our children. We have many years of damage to
23 repair, and if you want to be part of our healing
24 process, then let's do what's right now, and that
25 means that the maps that are being drawn are in a

1 way to ensure that most are Black and brown
2 representation. That the committee disregard the
3 voices of the billionaire's organization, that you
4 put our children before profit, please. That if the
5 committee considers any trailer bill, they consider
6 a bill that mandates and funds a board committee,
7 focused on advancing Black and brown student
8 achievement. That the committee ensures that the
9 voices of Black and brown parents are at the front
10 and center, and not drowned. Thank you. That's it.

11 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Rousemary. Thank
12 you for your passion. Our next speaker will be
13 Shlomo Soroka.

14 MR. SOROKA: Thank you, Chair Lightford and
15 honored committee members. My name is Rabbi Shlomo
16 Soroka, and I serve as the director of government
17 affairs for Agudath Israel of Illinois, which is an
18 umbrella organization that represents the interests
19 of the Orthodox Jewish community. I'll keep -- I'll
20 keep my remarks very brief. I'd like to begin by
21 thanking you for giving me this opportunity to
22 participate in this process. Our community is one
23 that, despite our unique needs and interests, is
24 unfortunately overlooked as a "community of
25 interest." Our community, which has grown

1 significantly over the last decade, is primarily
2 concentrated in the West Ridge area of Chicago, in
3 Senator Villivalam's district. The city dwelling
4 population is mostly located in the 50th ward, with
5 a few pockets in the 39th. I have submitted a map
6 that illustrates the most densely populated areas.
7 While most of our children actually do attend Jewish
8 schools, we have a vested interest in the welfare of
9 our public educational system for a few reasons.
10 Good schools, both public and private, are anchors
11 for community growth and are key components in
12 maintaining safe and welcoming neighborhoods. We
13 want our public schools to be well funded, properly
14 maintained, and to have the resources needed to
15 educate our city's general population. Secondly,
16 there are orthodox children that attend public
17 school, which is especially prevalent with our most
18 vulnerable students that have disabilities. This
19 includes my own nephew, Aaron, who attends Rogers
20 with many other Orthodox students. Students, such as
21 Aaron, who suffer -- who suffers from a rare
22 developmental disorder, often need additional
23 supports in a warm, welcoming, and culturally
24 sensitive environment. Thirdly, many community
25 members are employees at CPS, and it's not uncommon

1 for us to get calls here at Agudath Israel regarding
2 challenges they face regarding religious
3 accommodations in the workplace. And lastly, a
4 significant percentage of our students receive, or
5 actually should be receiving, equitable services,
6 such as Title I and IDEA through the district.

7 At times, the process can be complex and
8 frustrating, and even obtaining individualized
9 education plans, or IEPs, or individualized service
10 plans, otherwise known as ISPs, is becoming more and
11 more difficult. Just to give you an idea,
12 approximately 14 percent of CPS students have IEPs
13 and are receiving services, while less than 2
14 percent of our private school students are receiving
15 those same services. Ensuring these students
16 receive the right services in a way that's practical
17 and beneficial is a real challenge. Having a voice
18 through representation on this board will ensure
19 that these concerns, as well -- as well as others,
20 will be afforded due consideration. Again, I want
21 to thank you again for this opportunity, and please,
22 if you can consider keeping our community together
23 in the same -- in the same district, we'd be most
24 grateful.

25 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Thank you. The

1 next individual will be Clifford. Clifford Helm,
2 the senior counsel for Chicago Lawyers Committee for
3 Civil Rights.

4 MR. HELM: Thank you, Chair Lightford. And
5 thank you for the opportunity to write just some
6 very brief comments for today. So my name is Cliff
7 Helm. I'm a senior counsel at Chicago Lawyers
8 Committee for Civil Rights, which is a non --
9 non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to
10 advance racial equity and economic opportunity for
11 all. We collaborate with grassroots organizations
12 to implement community-based solutions that advance
13 civil rights. Our staff focuses on voting rights,
14 education equity, and equitable community
15 development in housing. I work within our voting
16 rights team with aims to reduce barriers to voting
17 and civic participation, especially in communities
18 of color and low-income communities. We aim to
19 ensure that all eligible voters are able to cast
20 ballots and the votes are not diluted, and that the
21 system does not undermine their fundamental right to
22 vote and right to choose their elected officials.
23 Additionally, our education equity team focuses on
24 dismantling systemic barriers to high quality
25 educational opportunities for historically

1 marginalized students, working within a -- within a
2 framework of community-driven advocacy. And all of
3 our work is grounded in a racial justice
4 perspective. The 21-seat elected representative
5 school board is an important step to ensuring that -
6 - towards ensuring communities, through voting, have
7 the ability to elect representative candidates that
8 will be connected to, and be accountable, to those
9 communities that elect them. This is particularly
10 important for Black and brown communities to be able
11 to shape policies and municipal decisions that
12 directly impact them. Districting is a vital but
13 complex piece of ensuring representation, and in
14 order for it to succeed, communities need to be able
15 to react to the proposed maps and provide feedback,
16 responses, and recommendation to those proposed
17 maps. As has been requested throughout this
18 process, I believe, and through potentially some
19 other advocates here, we request that the maps be
20 published with sufficient time for communities and
21 voters and parents and advocates to review and have
22 a meaningful opportunity for input in advance of
23 their final approval, and with sufficient time to
24 meet the required July 1st deadline. And thank you.
25 That's all my time.

1 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thanks, Cliff. Okay, our next
2 presenter will be Marc Kaplan, Northside Action for
3 Justice. Marc?

4 MR. KAPLAN: Yeah, good evening, Chairperson
5 Lightford and members of the Senate Committee, and
6 my fellow education justice fighters and advocates.
7 My name's Marc Kaplan. I think, most importantly,
8 I'm the grandparent of two public school children,
9 and I'm the father of a public school teacher.
10 But I also have been on local school councils in my
11 community since 1995, and I'm a member of Northside
12 Action for Justice. I -- Northside Action for
13 Justice has been working with parents, students,
14 community residents, teachers, and school staff for
15 decades in uptown and all over the north side,
16 organizing for education, justice, and high quality
17 public schools. NA4J was one of the groups that
18 fought for over a decade to win an elected
19 representative school board. The mayoral appointed
20 the school board, as my sister, Rousemary Vega, has
21 well pointed out, as done great harm and damage to
22 public school students and our communities,
23 particularly Black, brown, and low-income students
24 that attend those schools. An elected
25 representative school board will only be truly

1 representative of students, parents, and communities
2 if the districts and the elections are structured in
3 a way that maximizes the ability of parents and
4 communities that make up CPS, over 85 percent, which
5 are Black, brown, and low income, to be represented.
6 That is why we support the current plan of -- of 21
7 members, 20 districts that the proposed map
8 would -- would entail. This would allow districts
9 to be drawn that would respect communities and
10 maximize representation of Black, brown, and low-
11 income parents and the communities that make up the
12 major -- great majority of CPS students. A smaller
13 district size would also make it more doable for
14 parents and community members who do not have deep
15 pockets, or large amounts of money from outside
16 interests to run viable campaigns. It's no accident
17 that the same groups who oppose the elected
18 representative school board down the line and
19 supports public school privatization, are now trying
20 to derail the process of establishing a fully
21 representative elected school board that will be
22 democratically elected and truly represent the
23 parents and the communities that the vast majority
24 of CPS students come from. We urge the state
25 legislatures to stand firm in supporting the

1 20-district map and to allow parents and communities
2 that make up CPS to finally have the same rights as
3 all other parents and communities around the state.
4 Thank you so much for your time. We hope that you
5 stand firm to support the 20-district map as
6 proposed. Thank you.

7 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Marc. Catherine
8 Francis, parent.

9 MS. FRANCIS: Hi.

10 MS. LIGHTFORD: Catherine? Hi.

11 MS. FRANCIS: Hi. I'm Catherine Francis. Thank
12 you, Senator Lightford. I've served on the PTA at
13 Blaine Elementary, and I'm currently the Vice-Chair
14 of the LSC at Von Steuben Metropolitan High School.
15 As a CPS parent, I've been fighting for the elected
16 representative school board for the last 12 or more
17 years. I have two kids in CPS high school and have
18 lived with the appointed board dismissing parents'
19 concerns and providing us with little voice in our
20 children's education for these years. We have had
21 scandals with two CEOs, one of whom is in jail, and
22 have been voiceless when no big contracts are
23 renewed for services that are subpar. The new board
24 is an amazing opportunity to right this wrong.
25 The board should be based on 21 seats and the 20

1 districts that roughly represent the communities of
2 a state senator. A smaller board would be trying to
3 represent too many interests from multiple
4 communities and under-represent the voices of Black
5 and brown communities. The similar interests of the
6 smaller community could be more easily represented
7 by a single person. Seats, moreover, seats could be
8 more easily bought by the educational industrial
9 complex that is profiting from educational
10 contracts. We wait -- waited generations for this
11 change. The 21 seats were debated over many months
12 and years and should be maintained with a map that
13 represents these communities. Additionally, these
14 new board representatives should be paid for their
15 efforts, given how contentious school board meetings
16 have become in the current times and how much work
17 is required to provide appropriate oversight of CPS
18 and be available to the communities they serve.
19 These representatives need to be paid. The large
20 budget decisions need to be well understood, and so
21 please consider paying the representatives and
22 maintaining the 21-seat board that has been agreed
23 upon to date. Thank you.

24 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Catherine. Our next
25 guest, welcome back, Valerie Leonard from the

1 Illinois African Americans for Equitable
2 Redistricting.

3 MS. LEONARD: Thank you. Thank you so much.
4 I want to say thank you to you, Senator Lightford.
5 You've been a champion of elected school boards and
6 all kinds of structures prior to the elected school
7 board. I appreciate everything that you guys are
8 doing, Senator --

9 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER 1: Separate it.

10 MS. LEONARD: -- Martwick and this whole
11 panel --

12 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER 1: It says enter
13 credit card.

14 MS. LEONARD: -- is it possible for me to share
15 my screen? I wanted to share a very brief
16 presentation including a map.

17 MS. FRANCIS: I'm -- I can share it, Valerie.

18 MS. LEONARD: Is it okay? I can do that.

19 MS. FRANCIS: I don't think you will be able
20 to, but I can do it for you. I have the document,
21 just let me know when to move on.

22 MS. LEONARD: Okay. I -- it's -- the system
23 seems to be allowing me to do it. Can I -- can I go
24 ahead?

25 MS. FRANCIS: Okay. Go for it.

1 MS. LEONARD: Okay. Thank you. All righty.
2 We are Illinois African Americans for Equitable
3 Redistricting. And we have been together since
4 about 2021. We realized that there was a huge
5 opportunity to miss Black voices in that
6 redistricting process. And given that we are
7 currently in another redistricting process, we
8 thought that we would get involved in the creation
9 of the districts here for the elected school board.
10 And what we do is we provide education to voters and
11 other members of the community, as they relate to
12 redistricting issues, policies, and programs, and
13 show the relationship between districting proposals
14 and what could actually happen, you know, in our
15 day- to-day lives. We have provided oral and
16 written testimony at redistricting hearings at the
17 state and local levels, as well as participated in
18 mapping proposals. Most recently, a second
19 iteration of a proposed unity map for the state of
20 Illinois that would ideally optimize the ability for
21 people of color, you know, Black and brown to elect
22 candidates of choice around the state. All right,
23 just bear with me. All right, and then this is just
24 a summary of what we've accomplished so far this
25 year. We provided written and oral testimony at the

1 first hearing. We wrote an op-ed for Crain's
2 Chicago Business that'll be coming out very shortly.
3 We've helped to raise the awareness of issues
4 surrounding the elected board of education and
5 coordinated with over 30 different organizations to
6 write a letter, and you should have that in your
7 records, a letter to the legislature regarding our
8 position on elected representative school board.
9 And we also developed the proposal for the creation
10 of a standing committee, and I -- I want to stop
11 here. We want a standing committee, as opposed to
12 an advisory committee that will be permanent. It's
13 going to be a permanent part of the Board of
14 Education that focuses solely on issues of Black CPS
15 students and their families. And we've also
16 developed the mapping proposal that depicts the ten
17 districts for now. And we didn't -- we didn't
18 attempt it for the 20 districts in the future. But
19 at any rate, here is a list of people who have
20 signed off on that letter. These are grassroots
21 African American leaders, business owners, as well
22 as leaders of some of our old line organizations.
23 And when I say old line, I don't necessarily mean
24 that in a derogatory way, but you see organizations
25 here that range from, you know, ad hoc groups, brand

1 new groups, all the way to organizations that are
2 over 150 years old. They're from the South Side,
3 they're from the West Side, and we have all come
4 together. We put aside our little South Side and
5 West Side differences for the good of the community.
6 And basically, our proposal is twofold. The first
7 part is focused on governance. Again, we want to
8 create a standing African American Affairs Committee
9 of the Board of Education, and that committee would
10 actually be headed by two people from the board
11 of -- of education. And then, it would also draw
12 from a pool of people, you know, say your LSCs, your
13 CACs, your PACs, business leaders, civic leaders, et
14 cetera. And the reason why we want to do this is,
15 I -- I think very clear, and I think we're all in
16 agreement, that we have serious issues in the Black
17 community as it relates to our children. Our
18 children are leading the pack in all the negative
19 stuff, right? Things like suspension, expulsion,
20 juvenile arrests and detention, dropout rates, and
21 unaddressed mental health issues. And you may say,
22 well, what does that have to do with education? It
23 has everything to do with education. More and more,
24 our teachers are finding themselves in situations
25 where they're dealing with issues that they're not

1 equipped for. It's going to take a whole village to
2 address our issues. And children are also lagging
3 behind in the areas that really, really count
4 towards success, right? The measures of success.
5 We are not doing well on the standardized tests.
6 We're not even finishing school. We've lost a
7 number of kids. They have just, many of them, not
8 all, but many have just totally disengaged since
9 COVID-19. And so clearly, handling these issues at
10 the administrative and school levels are not enough.
11 You even have board committees that handles these
12 issues, I -- I guess in a general sense, but we need
13 an issue -- we need a committee that is laser
14 focused on our issues. And the second part of our
15 proposal is to create ten districts that are
16 comprised of five wards each. And you're clustering
17 the districts around communities of interest, and
18 racial and cultural and ethnic groups. And the
19 benefits of our proposal, first of all, it optimizes
20 the potential for Chicago voters to elect board
21 educate -- board of education candidates of their
22 choice. Secondly, it increases accountability of
23 the elected board members, as well as the alderman,
24 because this structure would encourage and
25 hopefully, put a lot of pressure on our alderman to

1 be more engaged in schools. We don't want a
2 situation where they're taking over the schools, but
3 we want them to work, you know, in tandem with our
4 elected officials who will be running our schools.
5 And as it stands now, you know, it's very easy for
6 our kids to slip between the cracks. And if we draw
7 these lines in a way that there's no clear-cut
8 accountability at the ward level, it I think, will
9 be much easier for our kids to continue to slip
10 between the cracks. This structure will hopefully
11 enable better coordination on issues that go beyond
12 the city level, go beyond the school level, even
13 including our county level and state level. And it
14 also -- also complies with the Voting Rights Act of
15 Illinois and the Voting Rights Act of the United
16 States. Why do we say that? Because these
17 districts have just recently been vetted. So we
18 know that they pass muster and they also, I guess to
19 the extent possible in the city of Chicago, they
20 create compact, contiguous districts to the extent
21 possible. And then they keep communities of
22 interest together to the extent possible. And here
23 is what the board of education structure would look
24 like. Everything in dark blue, these are existing
25 committees, and the light blues are proposed board

1 committee. So this would obviously include the
2 Early Childhood Education Committee, the Finance and
3 Audit Committee, the Whole Child Committee, the
4 Workforce Development and Equity Committee. We
5 would want our committee to work, obviously, in
6 tandem with these, but again, be laser focused in
7 dealing with issues that impact the African American
8 community. This would require taking the data and
9 all of the assessments that have been done over and
10 over, right? And developing an agenda and a plan of
11 action that can be monitored. The progress can be
12 monitored through, you know, some sort of
13 performance management system so that we can see
14 some real, real progress. But the beauty is you are
15 engaging people at the community level because
16 you're not just, you know, you're not just having a
17 committee with board members. You're also including
18 people from the PACs and the CACs and the LSCs, and
19 you know, people who really have their finger on the
20 pulse as to what's going on in our communities.
21 And this is not a perfect map by any stretch of the
22 imagination. This is, you know, one iteration of
23 what this could look like, all right? So we have
24 clustered groups of five wards each into the ten
25 districts. So each district has five wards.

1 Anything that's any shade of green has a majority or
2 plurality white composition. Anything in orange or
3 yellow is comprised of wards that are majority or
4 plurality Latino. Anything that's any shade of blue
5 is comprised of wards that are majority or plurality
6 Black. And at the bottom, that's a more diverse
7 ward, you've got a predominantly white ward on the
8 west, the 19th ward, and then in the center are
9 three Black wards. And then on the southeast corner
10 is the tenth district, which is primarily Latino.
11 Now, this -- like I said, this is not perfect, but I
12 think it's the optimal solution given all the
13 parameters we're working with. And that's my story
14 and I'm sticking to it. And if I had my druthers,
15 we'll have even more districts to make sure that
16 when we come back again in two years, that we could
17 still follow that same methodology and have two
18 wards per district. But you know, that's a fight
19 for another day. Thank you --

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you.

21 MS. LEONARD: -- very much for your time.

22 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you for your testimony.

23 Our next testimony is Willie Cole, Illinois African
24 Americans for Equitable Redistricting.

25 MS. COLE: Good morning. Thank you, Senator

1 Lightford. I am. My name is Willie Cole, and I am
2 a member of the Illinois African Americans for
3 Equitable Redistricting. I support the Map proposal
4 that Valerie Leonard has just reviewed for you.
5 I also support the creation of a standing African
6 American affairs committee of the board
7 specific --

8 MS. LIGHTFORD: I think you froze, Ms. Cole.

9 MS. COLE: -- and students with special
10 education needs and disabilities, a group who are
11 currently 15.3 percent of CPS' population. But as I
12 understand, it is growing every year. The majority
13 of these children are Black and brown. I think
14 parents need access to a group that is dedicated to
15 advocate for their children's special needs,
16 especially when it comes to realizing that IEPs or
17 tests do not alone tell the whole story of what
18 environments the children thrive in best or what
19 their needs are. For example, I personally know the
20 struggle it is for parents to have their children
21 placed in cluster programs versus being pushed into
22 general populations, where the classes are larger
23 and their students most often get very little, if
24 any, positive attention and support and thereby,
25 become lost. And finally, I also support the

1 recommendation for a paid school board, elected
2 school board. Thank you.

3 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Willie.

4 Next, we will have to welcome back again, Dwayne
5 Truss, Illinois African American for Equitable
6 Redistricting. Dwyane?

7 MR. TRUSS: Good evening, again. Thank you,
8 Leader -- Senator, State Senator Lightford and your
9 colleagues, Senator Martwick and Senator Aquino, and
10 the other members. I'd thank you for this
11 opportunity, thank you for your dedicated work and
12 thank you for keeping your commitment to making sure
13 that, as you can see the crowd is getting larger,
14 right, since it started. So that's the commitment,
15 the job for you -- for you and your staff. I just
16 want to be very, very short that I, too, support the
17 map presented by Valerie Leonard. And also want to
18 definitely want to encourage, well, ask you and push
19 back against the -- the effort by some groups to go
20 -- to make the recommendation to reduce the size of
21 the elected school board. I, too, like Valerie,
22 submitted an op-ed to Crain in which -- which bottom
23 line is that, you know what, we got something
24 historical. It's awesome. It's new, and the energy
25 should be focused on making it work. Nothing's

1 perfect in life, we all know that. But one thing we
2 can do -- we can control, the effort that we put
3 into it to make it work. Some, you know, I got -- I
4 see some great friends here that we all started up
5 this thing together about, you know, circulating
6 those petitions, getting those referendums on the
7 ballots, and, you know, and it is -- it's inspiring
8 and motivating that many groups are still here in
9 the -- in the role of advocates. And I just wanted
10 to just say, I sincerely appreciate it. Also, I'd
11 like to just -- I want to say one -- a -- a great
12 example of why we should have elected school board
13 since when you want to, you know, speak on something
14 that may not benefit people, you're -- you're --
15 you're not reappointed. So the cool thing about
16 having an elected school board is the fact that
17 communities can choose their own leader, and they
18 can have that person to represent them, that's just
19 not represented, just like the democratic process,
20 you cannot elect that person. There are those
21 concerns about financing. I understand that, you
22 know, this is just going to be an ongoing process
23 and we just all got to understand that there's going
24 be an ongoing process. There's going to be some
25 bumps in the road. Yes, I -- I do think that the

1 issue of compensation could seriously be looked at.
2 Because you know, for me it was a -- a -- a passion,
3 but part of that passion was that my wife didn't get
4 a chance to have a vacation for a while, because
5 many of those days, I had to take off from work, and
6 many of those days was just not attending board, or
7 pension board meetings, but going to out the schools
8 and just being able to understand the -- the
9 different communities you serve. And I've traveled
10 all the way from Rogers Park to the east side of
11 Chicago to see what's going on at Washington.
12 Because one thing that no matter what district you
13 may represent, those who may become members of the
14 future board, elected board, is that your vote is
15 going to impact more than just your constituents
16 within your district. So I just wanted to just take
17 -- just share that. But again, please make sure we
18 don't deviate from that 20 -- 21- person school
19 board. And we got to push back on those -- those
20 different groups. They knew this, they have
21 lobbyists, they've been at the table, also, in terms
22 of different discussions. And for them to come up
23 at the last minute, it's not right. They got, you
24 know, they can bring up their concerns. That's part
25 of the process. But by the same token, I'm glad to

1 see a lot of people here to push back and -- and I
2 just want to say, serving on the board was a -- is a
3 great pleasure. It is a -- a great experience.
4 It's tough, but I do believe that -- I do believe in
5 democracy. That's why we made this commitment.
6 That's why I volunteered to serve. And that's why
7 I do believe that this -- this - - this -- this
8 elected school board will work for Chicago, as well
9 as the state of Illinois. And again, thank you-all
10 for -- again, nice seeing some of you again, and
11 thank you for your commitment.

12 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thanks, Dwayne. Next, Natasha
13 Dunn, Black Community Collaborative.

14 MS. DUNN: Hi, good evening.

15 MS. LIGHTFORD: Good evening. Welcome.

16 MS. DUNN: Thank you so much for having this
17 space for us. However, I'm disappointed in the
18 engagement process overall in the drafting and
19 approval of this current elected school board bill.
20 In its current state, it fails to create a clear
21 pathway to an equitable process, specifically for
22 Black students and families in Chicago. The African
23 American community has been presented -- has not
24 been presented with an authentic and consistent
25 opportunity to provide and participate in the

1 drafting of this current bill. Discussions have been
2 limited to elected officials, the Chicago Teachers
3 Union, and groups funded by them, along with the
4 charter schools, charter groups. The vast majority
5 of which lack Black representation, maybe not Black
6 faces, but representation. And when we say
7 representation, we're -- we're meaning groups that
8 are specifically grounded and rooted in ensuring
9 that the Black community's reality is on the table.
10 These groups have sometimes falsely positioned
11 themselves as advocates in the voice of the
12 Black -- of the Black community by ignoring key
13 aspects of our reality. Additionally, relying on the
14 census data to draw maps ignore the plight of Black
15 students -- I mean Black residents. According to a
16 study done by University of Illinois, the largest
17 population lost occurred on the south and West Sides
18 in historically Black communities. The neighborhoods
19 with the largest growth are white and Hispanic
20 communities located on the north and northwest sides
21 of Chicago, and they also have the largest
22 population and density in the entire city.
23 But after decades of systemic racism, Black
24 students, teachers, and families haven't just pushed
25 out of CPS and out of the city of Chicago as a

1 whole. Black students used to make up the majority
2 of CPS students, along with Black teachers making up
3 the majority or semi, so the half of the population
4 of teaching -- of teachers within CPS, but
5 currently, that's not the demographic. Black
6 students now make up 36 percent of the population.
7 In over a 20-year time frame, we've lost almost 150
8 students, and this is unacceptable. And we want to
9 have a system and a say-so that will create real
10 racial equity. We don't want this to lean toward
11 continuing the systemic push-out of Black students
12 out of CPS and Black families out of the city.
13 Because we realize that our public schools play a
14 strong foundation in the population of Black people
15 because we want to have strong, stable schools that
16 we could send our children to and currently, that's
17 just not what's happening. So using census
18 date -- census data to draw maps will provide
19 predominantly white and wealthier communities with
20 greater access to voting districts and will further
21 marginalize Black communities. Finally, this is a
22 very serious concern. The absence of a clause
23 regarding spending limits during school board
24 election poses concerns about heavy influence and
25 domination from special interest groups. For

1 example, in 2017, Los Angeles Unified School
2 District Board elections, the teachers union and
3 charter school organization spent a combined \$15
4 million on candidates representing their agenda,
5 which undoubtedly obstructed the opportunities of
6 contenders with fuel financial resources and
7 connections. Because we know that these groups
8 fund other parent groups as well, who carry their
9 message. We need people who are on the board, who
10 are going to be middle road, who are going to hold
11 both -- both accountable, right? For ensuring that
12 our schools are going to provide equitable racial
13 equity and support for all students within the
14 system. And it is our mission as a collaborative
15 and a goal to ensure that the Black community's
16 representation is not obstructed, and that the
17 elected school board reflects 36 percent of the
18 student population. As a result, we are requesting
19 that you work with Black residents to create an
20 equitable map. We also support and are working with
21 Valerie Leonard and the Illinois African Americans
22 for Equitable Redistricting, and we support the map
23 that she presented, as well as legislation that is
24 currently -- that is culturally responsive to the
25 reality of our community, which would include

1 creating a Standing African American Affairs
2 Committee to prioritize problems that are unique to
3 the African American experience, as well as their
4 children and families. Thank you.

5 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Thank you, Natasha.
6 Now Brian Mullins, also from Black Community
7 Collaborative.

8 MS. CHATONDA: Hello?

9 MS. LIGHTFORD: Hi, Brian Mullins.

10 MS. CHATONDA: Can you hear me? I -- I logged
11 in because I did not get a -- a log in. This is
12 Rosita.

13 MS. LIGHTFORD: Rosita, we're on Brian right
14 now. Brian Mullins, Black Community Collaborative.
15 If he's not --

16 MS. CHATONDA: Yes, he's --

17 MS. LIGHTFORD: -- available then we'll go on
18 to Tawana Watts --

19 MS. CHATONDA: Okay.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: -- BeBe's Ark. Tawana Watts,
21 BeBe's Arks [sic]?

22 MS. WATTS: Hello, everyone. Thank you,
23 Senator Lightford, for your time and this
24 opportunity that you have presented all of us with.
25 I am here in representation of a parent from CPS

1 school system. I support everything that Valerie
2 Leonard said. I appreciate Ms. Willie Cole's
3 comment, as well as Natasha -- Natasha Dunn's
4 testimony. As a parent, I agree that there should
5 be -- that there should be a representation for the
6 Black and brown community, especially when it comes
7 to our education. Because the education that is
8 being presented for our students and the schools as
9 they share here early on, is that it is not -- it's
10 not even combat -- compatible, that is pretty much
11 outdated. We need someone that is going to be of
12 representation, again, not just of skin color, but
13 of representation that will stand firm on the things
14 that our students need. As well as point three that
15 Valerie brought up in making sure that, again,
16 education is something that is -- that is not an
17 option for our children, but a demand for our
18 children. I am a mother of a student that has a
19 disability, and so I have had some horrible
20 experience with -- when it comes to the IEP meeting,
21 when it comes to the classroom setting, as far as
22 the cluster classroom setting. And so thank you,
23 again, Ms. Natasha Dunn for all what you said,
24 speaking of that, as well as Ms. Willie. And so I
25 think that it should be a board that is going to be

1 very considerate of the parents when it comes to the
2 IEP and that -- that the board will take into
3 consideration that the parent has a voice when it
4 comes to creating an IEP for a student. And that
5 our voice will not just be considered a concern, but
6 also as part of the team when it comes to creating
7 the IEP for the students. I agree with Valerie
8 Leonard as well, as a map needs to be created for
9 our districts and making sure that our students and
10 our children are represented -- represented in a
11 number of ways. And that's pretty much all I have
12 to say, and thank you for your time.

13 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Tawana. Our next
14 guest is Georgetta Davis from Eminent Life Careers.
15 Ms. Davis? Okay, Ms. Davis. We'll move on to
16 Dr. Carmen Palmer, Educational Village Keepers.
17 Dr. Carmen?

18 DR. PALMER: Here I am. Thank you --

19 MS. LIGHTFORD: There you are.

20 DR. PALMER: -- Senator Lightford.
21 This is -- you are wonderful. Every speaker has
22 touched my heart in one way or another. I cry easy,
23 so I might. One of my Beasley babies, what was that
24 darling child's name? Ms. Nicole Johnson. I didn't
25 get a chance to let her know how proud I am to have

1 been one of her teachers. Okay, so the parent,
2 Rousemary Vega, I cried all through and after you
3 got off right along with you. Just a beautiful
4 statement. With that, I'm going to introduce myself
5 again. It's Dr. Carmen Palmer. I'm also going to
6 share a little bit that I speak today from the lens
7 of being an educational researcher in curriculum and
8 instruction, with a research specialty in
9 educational evaluation and I am national board
10 certified. However, more -- most importantly, I
11 speak through the lens of having retired from the
12 Chicago Public Schools after 35 years of service,
13 having raised two children that attended Chicago
14 public schools for their elementary and high school
15 years. And having completed my K through 12
16 education at CPS. Also having taught in a highly
17 performing magnet school for 25 of my 35 years of
18 service, sharpened my lens even more and made it
19 much more clear to me that the lack of equity in
20 funding of programs and funding of services, as well
21 as the lack of quality all-day preschools, were, and
22 are, the fundamental causes leading to the
23 performance outcome of our CPS children in general,
24 and African American children in particular. As a
25 result, when I retired from Chicago Public Schools

1 in 2007, I founded Educational Village Keepers,
2 known as EdVK. EdVK soon came to realize the
3 absolute dire need to replace mayoral control with
4 an elected school board. To that end, EdVK founded
5 and/or spearheaded the formation of collaborative
6 community organizations to advocate for an elected
7 school board for Chicago. In 2009, the EdVK
8 community PTA was chartered via Illinois PTA. In
9 2013, EdVK Community PTA produced a 13-week CAN TV
10 show around the question, does the school closings
11 of the CPS 50 schools make yet another case for an
12 elected school board? In addition, Education --
13 EdVK community PTSA secured a written letter of
14 support from the Illinois PTA president, and the
15 Illinois PTA Chicago region director, that was sent
16 to all legislators of the Illinois General Assembly
17 supporting House Bill 2908. In 2011, EdVK formed
18 the Chicago -- Chicago Community Coalition for an
19 elected school board, known then as CCC for ESB,
20 made up of 12 community-based organizations. In
21 2012, the CCC for ESB successfully circulated a
22 citywide petition for an advisory referendum to be
23 placed on the November 6th, 2012, ballot with the
24 question, should the City of Chicago have an elected
25 school board? Outcome 365 petitions with 4,000

1 signatures were submitted to the Board of Elections'
2 commissioners on August 3rd, 2012. Most recently,
3 EdVK has been working with the Kids First Chicago
4 elected school board task force. In-depth reading,
5 analyzing, and discussing House Bill 2908 has been
6 and is continuously being done. On October 1st of
7 2022, EdVK and Kids First Chicago
8 co-presented virtually the Elected School Board Far
9 South Side Parent and Community Info session. The
10 community received this valuable information with
11 great appreciation and expressed a strong desire to
12 know more. In going into the proposed elected
13 school board districts in collaboration -- in the
14 collaborative spirit of EdVK, the Illinois African
15 Americans for Equitable Redistricting is also a
16 community partner with whom EdVK works. I am here
17 today representing Educational Village Keepers and
18 announcing that EdVK supports the proposed elected
19 school board boundaries presented by the Illinois
20 African Americans for Equitable Redistricting.
21 IAAFER proposed that elected school board boundaries
22 be drawn such that there are five wards in each of
23 the ten districts. EdVK feels that the IAAFER
24 proposal is ideal for a variety of reasons. Those
25 reasons are: One, there are ten proposed districts

1 each with five wards. Two, districts have been
2 grouped to have diversity, while also comprising
3 pluralities. Three, clustering of the wards built
4 upon the present ward boundaries. Four, the
5 proposal provides an opportunity to foster a greater
6 sense of community across the five wards, with a
7 team of six elected officials who can work together
8 on behalf of their schools within their
9 districts/wards. Five, ward clustering promotes the
10 possibility of greater collaboration for the use of
11 resources in the way of city services that can be
12 wrapped around the schools within the five automatic
13 and the elected school board member -- among the
14 five automatic and elected school board member of
15 that elected school board district working together.
16 For example, with wrapping around with the Chicago
17 Police Department, or District Chicago Police
18 Department, the public libraries, our -- our park
19 districts, and et cetera. Next, number six,
20 aldermen could evolve into education aldermen, by
21 becoming more engaged and more knowledgeable about
22 the educational needs of the children and families
23 in their wards, and the needs of the schools in
24 their wards. Lastly, teamwork of aldermen and the
25 elected school board member could make the elected

1 school board dream work. There were a couple of
2 recommendations that I wanted to close my statement
3 with. Again, as was mentioned earlier, regarding
4 the creation of standing committees, this too --
5 these recommendations also build on that concept of
6 creating standing committees for the elected school
7 board that address clearly and much more
8 specifically the foundation blocks that, as an
9 educator, as a researcher, as a product of Chicago
10 public schools, that produce quality education. One
11 of the two is to consider a standing committee
12 entitled Academic Programs and Funding for Educating
13 the Whole Child, programs for all community, all
14 community, one more time, all community CPS schools
15 with teachers, such as library and media center and
16 librarians, physical education, preferably daily,
17 health and nutrition, swimming, sports programs,
18 music and choir, dance, foreign language,
19 multicultural education, African American History,
20 computer science and computer labs, hands-on science
21 and science labs. What's -- what labs? Civics
22 across the grades, all special education services,
23 including gifted. You know we do have -- we do have
24 gifted children that look like us and come in
25 multiple colors. Robotics and coding, keyboarding,

1 STEM, STEAM, vocational training, school
2 coordinators - - school coordinators. We need
3 school coordinators for reading, writing, math,
4 science, technology, parent engagement. It just
5 doesn't pop up, poof the magic dragon. That's just
6 -- that's what a quality education looks like, walks
7 like, talks like. That's what -- in the magnet
8 school that I had the privilege of working in for 25
9 to 35 years, that's what they had. And of course,
10 all those children are out there being great and
11 wonderful, just like that baby of mine, that Beasley
12 baby of mine, Nicole Johnson who spoke. These
13 children are out here doing -- all of our children.
14 It's not the children. It's the not funding of a
15 quality public school education that truly, truly
16 develops and educates the whole child. And then the
17 second is student support services and funding for
18 supporting the whole child, would be a great -- but
19 more than great, a necessary standing committee.
20 A school-based full-time school nurse, counselors
21 with an S -- one for every 100 children. I prefer
22 one for every 50. Our babies need a lot of support.
23 Case manager, social worker, speech therapist,
24 hearing and vision -- vision testing and follow-up,
25 school psychologists. In addition, before and after

1 school programs, tutors, sports activity, homework
2 assistance, parent programs, extracurricular events,
3 student clubs, program -- I mean this is what
4 schools walk like, talk like, and look like that
5 produce what it is that I know I wanted for mine.
6 They got it. They were at the school where I
7 taught. But every child deserved it. Third grade
8 dip prevention. Another word for that is that's the
9 beginning of the school-to-prison pipeline. One
10 fundamental understanding is that educational
11 structure is designed whereby from pre-K to third
12 grade is when children learn to read and from fourth
13 grade to 12th and beyond, they read to learn. Well,
14 if the babies haven't learned to read by third
15 grade, and many of ours don't, not because they
16 aren't able to, but because of what we're talking
17 about, then they are shackled with being behind and
18 trying to play catch up. Some do. Far too many
19 don't. So the third grade dip prevention suggests
20 that -- and this, again, would come under student
21 support services and funding, because you know,
22 everything has to be funded for supporting the whole
23 child. This would be something that would be
24 created with training of volunteers to serve as
25 tutors at the preschool through third grade. So

1 wherever they fall, what we would like to see is
2 99.9 percent of the children being at grade level by
3 third grade by any means necessary. So I'm going to
4 stop now because I get on a box. But thank you so
5 much for listening and God bless you, Senator
6 Lightford, and -- and your team. We need you.
7 We love you. And thank you.

8 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Dr. Palmer.
9 Our next guest is Jodie Cantrell, Illinois Network
10 of Charter Schools. Jodi? Okay. Angie Lobo,
11 Indo-American Center. Angie?

12 MR. BROWN: Senator Lightford, who did you
13 call?

14 MS. LOBO: Me.

15 MS. LIGHTFORD: I called Jodie Cantrell.

16 MR. BROWN: Okay. Sorry.

17 MS. LIGHTFORD: And Angie Lobo.

18 MS. LOBO: Jodi's not here, right?

19 MS. LIGHTFORD: Right. Is Angie here?

20 MS. LOBO: Yeah, that's me. Hi.

21 MS. LIGHTFORD: Okay.

22 MS. LOBO: Good evening, everyone. How are you
23 doing? Thank you so much for having me and all of
24 us here today, this opportunity for transparency. I
25 am Angie. Here, I'm going to move this. Okay.

1 I'm Angie Lobo. I'm the Executive Director at
2 Indo-American Center. We're located in the West
3 Ridge neighborhood of Chicago. IAC is a
4 community-based organization serving the immigrant
5 community in West Ridge and South Asian immigrants
6 throughout the Metro area, legal Services, ESL
7 classes, senior lunch program, chronic disease
8 intervention, and case management. I also live in
9 Senator Martwick's district. Hi, Senator. And I'm
10 a CPS parent. I am here to advocate in support of
11 the map that Grace Pai from Asian Americans
12 Advancing Justice is submitting a -- as part of her
13 testimony. South Asians are the fastest growing
14 ethnic group in the Midwest and comprise over 36
15 percent of the Asian population in Illinois.
16 Additionally, there are over 33,000 undocumented
17 Indians in Illinois, which is the second largest
18 population of undocumented folks in the state. The
19 majority of South Asians in the state are foreign-
20 born and face the universal immigrant struggles such
21 as language barriers, unsafe and exploitative
22 working conditions, difficulty accessing affordable
23 housing, and general unfamiliarity with US
24 institutions, social institutions, and structure. So
25 at Indo-American Center, we partner with our local

1 elementary schools, such as Boone and Clinton, to
2 provide additional community and parent supports in
3 the classroom as part of our parent mentor program.
4 And according to CPS profiles, Clinton and Boone are
5 90 percent low-income, and over 60 percent of the
6 students have limited English. 46 percent and 36
7 percent of the students are Asian, respectively.
8 At Clinton, students speak 45 different languages,
9 and at Boone, students speak over 30 languages. So
10 I'm saying all of that to -- to really build the
11 case for the importance of -- oh my God, and now I
12 lost my spot -- plurality districts as designed in
13 this map that we're talking about tonight. We
14 believe it's essential to keep these school
15 districts together, including the local high school,
16 for parents and immigrant communities that are
17 learning leadership and CPS navigation through our
18 parent mentor programs, so that they can voice
19 their -- their needs to an elected school board
20 member who most accurately represents the needs of a
21 concentrated Asian American community in the four
22 areas of Asian influence that we've been talking
23 about. We all know that parent engagement is the
24 key to student achievement, and thriving schools
25 that are welcoming to families and students are

1 essential to neighborhood safety. So we think by
2 designing districts that accurately reflect the
3 diversity of the area, not just the diversity of
4 the overall city, but specifically the area, parents
5 will get to see representatives that reflect and
6 understand the Asian immigrant community, which
7 will positively reinforce the parental engagement
8 and student achievement. Thank you so much for your
9 time.

10 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Angie, for your
11 testimony. Next, will be Sonam Mohindra,
12 Indo-American Center.

13 MS. MOHINDRA: Good evening, everyone. Thank
14 you, Leader Kimberly, and to the special committee.
15 My name is Sonam Mohindra. I'm a parent of two
16 amazing CPS children. My younger one is in second
17 grade and the older one is in fifth grade. I'm the
18 coordinator of the peer mentor program and I do
19 volunteer hours in the Boone Elementary School in
20 two classes. I'm going to share my experience being
21 a parent and volunteer working in school. I enjoy
22 working with teachers and students, as well as
23 learning about their social and emotional behavior
24 with diverse learners in school. Working in the
25 education field gives me a chance to meet and share

1 real-life experiences with the teachers and
2 children. Through the Indo-American Center, the
3 peer mentor program really gave me encouragement to
4 work in -- for my community schools. I have a
5 diverse program -- really, I have a diverse team of
6 peer mentors in my program. They all are bilingual
7 speakers, and they speak Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, and
8 Pashto. They are helping children who need help in
9 their native languages and teachers are really happy
10 to have parents in their classrooms, and children
11 feel more comfortable with parents who speak their
12 native languages. They need more parental
13 engagement in their schools to address the specific
14 language barriers and needs of immigrant families.
15 Being a parent at Clinton and coordinator at Boone,
16 I realized our teachers need help. It would be
17 great if we can have more parent engagement in our
18 community schools. I think our community should
19 stay in the same districts so the school board can
20 help address students' diverse needs. I'm happy to
21 help my school community and I feel proud to be an
22 Asian American who is a bilingual speaker. I hope
23 you will help us continue the program and educate
24 parents to get involved in our schools, helping our
25 children and school staff as well. I support the

1 map from Asian American Advance -- Advancing Justice
2 because it'll make sure that our elected school
3 board reflects the Asian Americans who make up to
4 20 percent of the area. An elected school board
5 with diverse leaders who can understand the lived
6 experiences of bilingual families in Chicago will
7 better represent the Asian American refugees,
8 immigrants, and ELL students in our community. This
9 representation will help our students and families
10 who have unique needs in Chicago. Thank you.

11 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Appreciate your
12 testimony. The next guest following Sonam is
13 Corrina Demma. Corrina Demma, Educators for
14 Excellence. Corrina Demma? Okay. Is Alexandra
15 Minor, also from Educators for Excellence.
16 Alexandra Minor? Okay. Yolanda Williams, Elected
17 School Board Task Force, Kids First Chicago.
18 Yolanda Williams?

19 MS. WILLIAMS: Good evening, committee members.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Good evening, Yolanda.

21 MS. WILLIAMS: My name is Yolanda Williams.
22 Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

23 MS. LIGHTFORD: Yes, uh-huh. Please proceed.

24 MS. WILLIAMS: Okay. My name is Yolanda
25 Williams. I would like to thank you for giving me

1 the opportunity to speak to you today. I am a
2 resident of the Austin community in Don Harmon's
3 district. I am a parent of a diverse learner who is
4 currently a sophomore at Michele Clark High School.
5 I have served on PACs and LSCs for numerous years.
6 I am currently on the ODLSS Family Advisory Board,
7 the co-chair of early learning for COFI POWER-PAC,
8 and was appointed to sit on the office of the
9 Governor's Early Learning Council in 2021. I am
10 here tonight representing the Kids First Chicago
11 Elected School Board Task Force. My daughter,
12 Caitlin (phonetic), has been in the cluster special
13 education program since pre-K. I know the
14 challenges that diverse learners face, especially
15 those, like Caitlin, who live and attend high school
16 in a community like Austin. I believe that diverse
17 learners should be thought of first, the same way we
18 might give up our seats for the elderly on the bus.
19 We should be trying to take care of our diverse
20 learners first. My experience at CPS has often been
21 the opposite of that. Prior to COVID, the special
22 education class in her elementary school was the
23 last group in the whole school to get laptops.
24 Meanwhile, schools in more affluent neighborhoods
25 are better resourced and their students have greater

1 access to resources at home. That's why we need to
2 have people in important roles at CPS who prioritize
3 supporting students like Caitlin. I think it's
4 important that we have board members who understand
5 the needs of diverse learners in school. But it's
6 especially critical that they understand the unique
7 challenges that Black and brown diverse learners
8 face outside of school. I believe a school board
9 that reflects CPS' diversity can better understand
10 the needs of children in our communities and will
11 deliver better results for our students. The Kids
12 First Chicago Elected School Board Task Force
13 submitted a set of district maps to this committee
14 to serve as an example that you can account for the
15 racial makeup of CPS students and families, while
16 creating these districts and still abide by legal
17 requirements of maintaining compact districts. We
18 encourage committee members to look at this example
19 before beginning to draw your own district maps. We
20 hosted a town hall event on this topic last
21 Wednesday and had over 300 attendees. When asked
22 about their ideal makeup of the school board,
23 parents prefer a board that aligns with CPS
24 demographics over Chicago demographics by a
25 five-to-one margin. If this committee respects

1 those wishes, then we believe that CPS families will
2 be better represented and served by the future
3 elected school board, leading to better outcomes for
4 all CPS students. Thank you.

5 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Thank you.
6 I appreciate your testimony, Yolanda. Next, we will
7 have Ricky Ghandi. Ricky?

8 MR. GHANDI: Hello everyone. Good evening.
9 My name --

10 MS. LIGHTFORD: Hi, Ricky.

11 MR. GHANDI: -- is Ricky. How's everyone
12 doing? My name is Ricky Ghandi, and I am the
13 political director at Asian Americans Advancing
14 Justice Chicago or Advancing Justice Chicago for
15 short. Thank you to Chair Lightford and members of
16 the committee for this opportunity to testify. The
17 Asian American community is the fastest growing
18 racial demographic in Chicago Illinois and in the
19 country overall. As was mentioned in previous
20 testimonies in Chicago, the Asian American
21 population grew by 31 percent from 2010 to 2020.
22 And while the greater Chinatown area has the highest
23 Asian American density in Chicago, it's not the only
24 area with significant Asian American communities.
25 West Ridge, Albany Park, Uptown Edgewater, the UIC,

1 and near Westside also have Asian American
2 population density. And that's why Advancing Justice
3 Chicago strongly urges the committee to create at
4 least four Asian American influence districts, and
5 to preserve Asian American communities of interest
6 in the new school board map. Assuming the final map
7 contains 20 districts, we believe it is possible to
8 draw at least two districts that are more than 19
9 percent Asian American, and two districts that are
10 more than 11 percent Asian American, based on voting
11 age population. If it is possible to draw an Asian
12 American majority district, then we urge the
13 committee to create one. Our proposed districts
14 will be provided in -- in the written testimony as
15 well. These districts are also going to contain a
16 significant amount of non-Asian immigrant
17 communities as well, which share many of the same
18 issues and struggles that Asian American communities
19 face, such as language barriers, lack of
20 citizenship, and overall xenophobia. As such,
21 advocating on behalf of Asian Americans will also
22 benefit other immigrant communities as well. The
23 first district that we proposed is -- is comprised
24 of Chinatown, Bridgeport, South Loop, McKinley Park,
25 and Brighton Park, which would be roughly 25 percent

1 Asian American, 33 percent Latino, and 13 percent
2 Black. Notably, Chicago's Chinatown neighborhood is
3 the only growing Chinatown in the entire country,
4 and many Chinese Americans live in the neighboring
5 areas of Bridgeport, South Loop, McKinley Park,
6 Brighton Park -- and Brighton Park. Our proposed
7 map also attempts to take into account the
8 attendance boundaries for local high schools.
9 Roughly a third of Phillips High School, a majority
10 of Kelly High School, and about half of the Tilden
11 High School's boundaries are included in the
12 district. The second district we propose combines
13 West Ridge, North Park, Albany -- and Albany Park,
14 which would be about 20 percent Asian American, 30
15 percent Latino, about 6 and a half percent Black.
16 West Ridge has a vibrant South Asian business
17 corridor and community that is centered on Devon
18 Avenue. And Albany Park also has a historically --
19 has a historically Asian American business corridor
20 along Lawrence Avenue with many Korean, Filipino,
21 and South Asian business owners and residents
22 choosing to make Albany Park their home. This
23 district contains nearly all of the Mather High
24 School attendance boundary, a vast majority of the
25 Roosevelt High School attendance boundary. The

1 third district runs along the north side lakefront,
2 combining Rogers Park, Edgewater, and Uptown, would
3 be about 12 percent Asian American, 16 percent
4 Latino, about 20 percent Black. Uptown is home to
5 the Argyle business corridor, also known as Asia on
6 Argyle, which has many Southeast Asian-owned
7 restaurants and small businesses. Rogers Park and
8 Edgewater also have notable Asian American
9 populations, along with other immigrant and refugee
10 communities. This district contains the entire
11 Sullivan High School attendance boundary, and the
12 vast majority of the Senn High School attendance
13 boundary. And the fourth and last district that
14 we're proposing would come -- would combine the
15 Loop, Streeterville, Greektown, UIC, and Near West
16 Side areas, and would be 14 and a half percent Asian
17 American, 7 percent Latino, about 13 percent Black.
18 Voting age population estimates showed the
19 possibility of drawing another district with -- with
20 an Asian American population greater than 10
21 percent. So we've included this in our -- in our
22 proposal. This district would contain almost all of
23 the Wells High School attendance boundary, along
24 with small portions of neighboring high school
25 boundaries. Keeping Asian American communities

1 together is important because Asian Americans have
2 long faced discrimination and continue to do so, and
3 we've seen this throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
4 Historically, Asian American communities have been
5 underrepresented in all forms of government.
6 Keeping our communities together in a single
7 district, rather than divided across multiple
8 districts, will allow Asian American voters to have
9 a greater say in school board elections and will
10 help ensure that school board members are
11 accountable to Asian American voters' priority
12 issues and concerns. Advancing Justice Chicago drew
13 these four districts in consultation with Asian
14 American community organizations. Our map is
15 supported by the Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant
16 Rights and Empowerment Coalition for Better Chinese
17 American Community, ONA Center, Indo-American
18 Center, Muslim Civic Coalition, and South Asian
19 American Policy and Research Institute. Regarding
20 process, we urge the committee to prioritize
21 transparency and create additional opportunities to
22 provide public input. Members of the public deserve
23 to provide meaningful feedback after a map
24 has -- after a draft map has -- is made public, so
25 that public input can be incorporated into future

1 revisions. In conclusion, as Asians continue to
2 face discrimination and lack of representation in
3 government, it is vital that they have a voice in
4 electing their school board members. Advancing
5 Justice Chicago calls for the committee to create,
6 at minimum, the four Asian American influenced
7 districts outlined above, and to preserve these
8 communities of interest in the new school board map.
9 Thank you, again, everybody for your time.

10 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, Ricky. Now is Jitu
11 Brown, from Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization.
12 It's your turn, Jitu.

13 MR. BROWN: Can you hear me?

14 MS. LIGHTFORD: Yes, please proceed.

15 MR. BROWN: All right. Well good evening,
16 Senator Lightford. Good evening, Senator Martwick
17 and the rest of the committee. Goatee looks good,
18 Senator Martwick, but I -- I'll get to the point.
19 There's a quote that says the foundation of any
20 nation are the institutions that lay the structure
21 for the people's development. And as a lifelong
22 Chicagoan, a parent of a CPS student, a product of
23 Chicago public schools, and a community organizer
24 for the last 34 years of my life, we have lived
25 through state-sponsored sabotage of our basic

1 quality of life institutions. None more glaring
2 than the -- the lack of representation on the school
3 board, which has led to the destruction of public
4 education in Black communities. There's a reason
5 why this bill is called Elected Representative
6 School Board. For many of us that have been
7 fighting for this since 2006, when Senator Martwick
8 stepped up and said he would carry this bill, he
9 went into our communities and he understood why we
10 said representative. Because what we had in the
11 current Chicago public -- in that -- the current
12 Chicago public schools school board were
13 billionaires and connected politicians, or people
14 that were connected to the business community, who
15 were determining what should happen to schools in
16 our community, often ignoring deep-seated inequity
17 and making decisions that have a clear result.
18 Senator Lightford, you started the beginning of this
19 conversation saying that Black people are 29 percent
20 of Chicago. We must remember that 20 years ago in
21 the year 2000, we were 53 percent of Chicago. So
22 what we are in -- what we are experiencing is not
23 Black people running from violence, we are
24 experiencing Black people being purged out of the
25 city of Chicago because of the sabotage of our basic

1 quality of life institutions that most people take
2 for granted. A decent school, a grocery store,
3 decent affordable housing. And so I think that we
4 are asking you as a committee to stand firm and to
5 keep the seats at 21, because there was a process
6 that started in 2012 of town hall meetings, slow,
7 respectful engagement of the public. When we first
8 drew our map, and I'm sure Senator Martwick still
9 has it in his files, we came up with 13 districts.
10 And as we began to engage communities and elected
11 officials, and particularly, the West Side said that
12 they were underrepresented. And so through
13 negotiation, we came up with 21 seats to make sure
14 that everyone is represented. I would strongly
15 encourage this committee to -- and this is no
16 reflection on the sisters and brothers that are
17 speaking from this particular organization. But
18 it's -- it's -- it's -- many of the people that
19 you're talking to right now, that are talking about
20 the 21 seats, are the same people who fought
21 ferociously against school closings, are the same
22 people who knew what this would do to Black and
23 brown children, and have spent over a decade on the
24 front lines. And we didn't see many of those
25 partners in the organizations that are now saying to

1 reduce the number of people. When we talk special
2 interests, we must remember that it was the
3 Commercial Club of Chicago, it was not a teacher's
4 union, it was the Commercial Club of Chicago, a
5 group of corporations in the city of Chicago, who
6 wrote Renaissance 2010, which was the first phase of
7 school closings in Chicago. And the result of that
8 has been the decimation of Black teachers in Chicago
9 public schools. In the year 2000, we were 44 percent
10 of the teaching force. Today we're 19. 50 -- at
11 least 50,000 young people gone from Chicago public
12 schools. That's the legacy of a lack of
13 representation. And so I would ask us not to
14 succumb to the politics of fear, saying that there
15 are too many members, there are too many members on
16 city council, there are too many members in the
17 Illinois state legislature, there are too many
18 members in Congress. Democracy is how we get to
19 equity. We don't get to equity through -- through
20 special interest groups funding school board
21 elections, or appointed school boards. The last
22 thing I will say is that I would ask this committee
23 to take this to the education committee. That there
24 needs to be a public hearing on the harm that's been
25 done over the last 20 years. See, what we often do

1 is we want to blow it off. But when we see -- when
2 we see thousands of young people, or we see 12 year
3 olds doing carjackings, we want to disconnect it
4 from the destruction of public education in our
5 communities. But those of us that are on the
6 ground, and I am a proud son of the oldest Black led
7 grassroots community group in the city of Chicago
8 with over a thousand members, the Kenwood-Oakland
9 Community Organization, KOCO, right on 42nd and
10 Saint -- Cottage Grove. 100 percent grassroots, 100
11 percent independent, 100 percent African American.
12 And we have watched and fought to stop the
13 privatization of schools in our community. So much
14 so, so voiceless, that despite the improvements we
15 made at Dyett High School, in order for us to be
16 heard, we had to wage a 34-day hunger strike. We
17 had to starve our bodies in order to save a public
18 high school. That is an in -- and today due to the
19 strength of the people in our community in
20 Bronzeville, that high school is a thriving high
21 school with state-of-the-art infrastructure. But
22 the community had to go to unbelievable lengths in
23 order to make that happen. We must have
24 accountability for the harm that's been done and we
25 must have the courage, this is a moment for courage,

1 for us to stand up and make sure that we have
2 democracy. A prerequisite to equity is governance
3 and equity cannot be determined by seats of
4 privilege. Those closest to the pain must be
5 closest to the power. Thank you so much,
6 I appreciate you-all. Have a good evening.

7 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Thank you for your
8 testimony. Rosita Chatonda, founding president,
9 Teach for the Future, Incorporated. Rosita?
10 I know she's on -- and she's seeking recognition.

11 MS. CHATONDA: Yes. Hello?

12 MS. LIGHTFORD: -- and she's seeking
13 recognition.

14 MS. CHATONDA: Can you hear me?

15 MS. LIGHTFORD: Yes, I can. Uh-huh. Please
16 proceed, welcome.

17 MS. CHATONDA: Yes, thank you. I'm going to
18 take -- try to take the video off. My name is
19 Rosita Chatonda, I am the founding director of Teach
20 for the Future, Incorporated, and C.A.U.S.E.
21 teachers to non- for-profits. I have a long
22 history. As with many of these people, I started my
23 journey in education in a variety of ways. As a
24 parent first and I have children, four, that have
25 come through private and public schools. I'm a

1 product of Catholic school. I grew up in Cabrini on
2 the north side, and I am a product of a free
3 education, coming from a very poor community. So
4 with that in mind, as I proceeded to teach in our
5 most at-risk communities in the projects and -- at
6 Williams School, I was there, we were the first
7 school closed under Renaissance 2010. And I learned
8 a lot. I learned a lot from that experience
9 in -- in a way that I always kept it in the back of
10 my mind, that on that day at Williams School, three
11 prison buses pulled up to our school and our school
12 was shut down in a matter of hours. I went, after
13 that experience, on to teach. I've taught every
14 race of children in Chicago public schools. I've
15 taught Asians, I've taught white children, I've
16 taught Black children and every -- just about every
17 race. Indians, immigrant children, and one of the
18 things that I noticed most of all was the lack of
19 advocacy for poor African American children, and
20 it's one of the reasons why I started my
21 non-for-profit, Teach for the Future. I started with
22 that as a curriculum-based organization to provide
23 services for first generation, low-income children.
24 I ran a program as the educational advisor at CVS
25 High School, right up until the pandemic. I -- I'm

1 not going to go into a lot of that because it would
2 take -- and I know everybody, this is a long night.
3 But I do -- I've been at just about every school
4 board meeting for about ten years, to the point
5 where I just couldn't go anymore. And I couldn't go
6 anymore, because I couldn't get anyone to listen to
7 anything I was saying. They gave a nod, and then
8 that was it, after we spent a whole day preparing a
9 two-minute speech and felt that as a community, we
10 weren't being heard by anyone. So I just stopped
11 going because it just didn't make any sense, it was
12 a waste of time. And this is why I'm supporting the
13 elected school board. Getting back to the
14 decimation of Black teachers, I started a petition
15 with over 5,000 signatures because I was concerned.
16 I watched a drop when I was at Williams School, and
17 I was concerned about the number of Black teachers
18 and the fact that we had 163 schools closed, and 99
19 percent were in the African American community.
20 100 under Mayor -- Mayor Daley, which a lot of
21 people forget. I then went on to work for the
22 Chicago Teachers Union for a short time because I
23 was organizing C.A.U.S.E. teachers at Operation PUSH
24 for about three years. We decided that we weren't
25 getting much support from CTU or CPS, so we decided

1 as a group of teachers to support each other. A lot
2 of our teachers had been terminated, a lot of our
3 teachers had lost homes, a lot of our teachers'
4 children had to come home from colleges. A lot of
5 our teachers died, a lot of our teachers got sick.
6 And so over the past ten years, a little bit over
7 that now, about 11 or 12, we have been a group of
8 teachers just trying to give support to each other
9 and trying to help build each other up. I am
10 supporting the elected school board in hope that we
11 do have the 21-member team as Valerie -- I do
12 support the map that Valerie did. There's others on
13 here -- Dr. Palmer, we have all worked together and
14 been in some -- in some ways, working together over
15 the last 12 or 13 years. So I am here to support
16 the elected school board, and then to talk a little
17 bit about the inequity and injustice that I have
18 witnessed as a teacher, in terms of African American
19 children and those who are poor. And we're not
20 necessarily talking about those who are state 9-9,
21 state 9-8. Over the course of my educating
22 children, I realized that there was something that
23 our children weren't getting that other children
24 were. And one of the things I realized was the
25 literacy piece. And I'm hoping that you will form a

1 committee to address some of the systemic things
2 that have happened to Black children as a result of
3 slavery, those who are descendants of those who were
4 enslaved, and the whole literacy piece. And I have
5 a petition out, Literacy for ADOS Children, children
6 who are descendants of slavery. And I want everyone
7 to kind of think about this, as our language was
8 passed down from generation, without any real formal
9 way, we -- our children learned how to speak
10 English, if that's what we call it, but they're
11 actually speaking a dialect of the English language.

12 MS. LIGHTFORD: Ms. Rosita?

13 MS. CHATONDA: Yeah?

14 MS. LIGHTFORD: Ms. Rosita, I don't mean to
15 interrupt, but can you just speak to the map
16 process? Because we still have three more speakers
17 and we've been on for a little over two hours now.

18 MS. CHATONDA: Okay.

19 MS. LIGHTFORD: So --

20 MS. CHATONDA: Well, I think that --

21 MS. LIGHTFORD: -- as to the map. But I'd like
22 to work with you on the literacy piece.

23 MS. CHATONDA: Okay.

24 MS. LIGHTFORD: I have a literacy bill -- a
25 bill right now, that you can join --

1 MS. CHATONDA: Thank you.

2 MS LIGHTFORD: -- in with me on, and we can
3 talk on the side.

4 MS. CHATONDA: Okay, well thank you very much.
5 I just wanted to get that in and there is a literacy
6 competition out that I have. As far as the map is
7 concerned, we did have a meeting with Valerie
8 Leonard. And the map, we are all C.A.U.S.E.
9 teachers, Teach for the Future, we're supporting
10 Valerie and the map that she has put together. And
11 I won't go any further than that, and I hope
12 to -- I'll work with you in terms of the literacy
13 piece, thank you.

14 MS. LIGHTFORD: Great, thank you.

15 MS. CHATONDA: And thank you for your time.

16 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you, and I look forward
17 to that. Please give me a call so we can work on
18 that quickly.

19 MS. CHATONDA: Thank you.

20 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. Lee Mabry
21 (phonetic)? Leah? Is it Lee or Leah? Okay,
22 M-A-B-R-Y, last name. M-A-B-R-Y? Okay, so now
23 there was a gentle -- Jodie has chimed back in,
24 Jodie Cantrell?

25 MS. CANTRELL: Hi, I'm here. Thank you so much

1 for the opportunity to speak tonight. Good evening,
2 Chair Lightford, Vice-Chair Martwick, Vice- Chair
3 Aquino, and members of the committee. My name is
4 Jodie Cantrell and I am representing the Illinois
5 Network of Charter Schools. INCS is a statewide
6 membership organization representing 114 public
7 charter schools in the City of Chicago that educate
8 nearly 55,000 students. As background, one in every
9 four high school students in CPS attends a charter
10 school, and one in every eight elementary students
11 in CPS attends a charter school. 98 percent of
12 students in charter schools identify as students of
13 color, and 86 qualify for -- or 86 percent of
14 students qualified for free or reduced lunch.
15 Charter public schools have been a part of the CPS
16 family of schools for over 25 years and have
17 successfully been providing families with a
18 high-quality public-school option in their
19 neighborhoods. This has led to increased high school
20 graduation rates, college enrollment, and college
21 completion rates for students across the city.
22 Charter schools more recently have really been
23 working with family and serving as community hubs
24 throughout the pandemic and supporting families and
25 community members with resources, technology, health

1 supplies, food and mental health supports. The
2 charter community has and always will stand ready
3 and willing to engage and collaborate to ensure CPS
4 is a world-class educational system for our city,
5 students and families because we know they deserve
6 nothing less. That is why we believe strongly that
7 representation matters, and we look forward to
8 engaging with parents, school communities, charter
9 alumni, voters, CPS staff legislators, and broad
10 Chicago residents in these critical conversations,
11 as CPS transitions to a newly elected board. Our
12 hope is for the process, starting with these
13 district maps that ensure all voices and
14 stakeholders are brought to the table and they'll
15 have a strong, fair representation across the city.
16 We appreciate the hard work of all of our lawmakers
17 and decision makers to make sure equity is front and
18 center, and that the CPS board structure really puts
19 students first. Because of this, INCS has joined a
20 coalition with other education advocates to just ask
21 lawmakers to use this opportunity to bring some
22 greater equity to the new elected school board in
23 Chicago by making two changes. First, we're asking
24 lawmakers to consider reducing the board of
25 education size to nine seats. This would recognize

1 that CPS is the largest district in the state and
2 bring it into the range of sizes of the many other
3 public boards. At 21 members, Chicago's school
4 board be triple the size of other Illinois school
5 boards and at least twice the size of most public
6 boards serving Chicago and statewide. For example,
7 CTA has seven members, the State Board of Education
8 has eight, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation
9 District has nine. The current CPS board size may
10 make it difficult for board members to make timely,
11 actionable and student-centered decisions, and cost
12 significantly more taxpayer dollars that could
13 otherwise be going to the classrooms. Second, state
14 law prohibits school board members from being paid.
15 Having to serve without pay does not give parents
16 and other working community members the same
17 opportunities to serve. By allowing for
18 compensation, the reality of serving on the board
19 will be more realistic for parents and CPS alumni
20 and others who are called to public service but may
21 not have the means to volunteer. We appreciate your
22 time today and we're looking forward to working with
23 you and engaging in this process as CPS transitions
24 to the newly elected school board. Thank you.

25 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thank you. I appreciate you

1 hopping back on. Crystal Overton (phonetic)? Is
2 Crystal on? I don't know that I see her. Okay.
3 And Tina Augustus?

4 MS. AUGUSTUS: Thank you so much, Leader
5 Kimberly Lightford, for allowing me to speak.
6 And good evening for -- it's pretty much late, to
7 all the senators who are here in this hearing. I am
8 a representative of the Illinois African Americans
9 for Equitable Redistricting and support the letter
10 and map addressed to you, Leader Kim -- Kimberly
11 Lightford, Senator Robert F. Martwick, and Senator
12 Omar Quinnan -- Aquino by community stakeholder,
13 Valerie F. Leonard. I am a proud -- not proud, I am
14 proud, Black person. I am a product of a business
15 owner, Jesse Gulley, who was an electrician and had
16 his own business before I was born a little over
17 60 years ago. He was my example and first business
18 mentor. It was being engaged with my father's
19 business and seeing how he ran his business, never
20 giving up, although he faced much discrimination,
21 lack of capital, and other challenges that have
22 forced many Black-owned businesses to shut their
23 doors. He was a true champion. What I learned in
24 my home with my father and my college educated
25 mother gave me what I needed to overcome the poor

1 education that I received through the Chicago Board
2 of Education. Despite a poor primary and high
3 school education, I graduated with college --
4 graduated college with honors. As a current
5 business owner located on the West Side of Chicago,
6 the head of the Chicago West Side Chamber, and a
7 board member of the Illinois State Chamber of
8 Commerce, I have been firsthand -- have seen
9 firsthand the disadvantages that Black-owned
10 businesses face on a daily basis. The same is also
11 reflected in our public school educational system
12 where our Black and brown youth are not prepared to
13 compete with many white youth educationally, when
14 they enter college and after graduation. I am a
15 former LSC council member, both as a parent and as a
16 community member. And know that as an LSC member,
17 you -- you only have an option to vote on a budget
18 that has already been assigned to your school.
19 With a newly elected school board, proper
20 representation will be present from the Black and
21 Brown communities, and families will have a true
22 right to help shape their children's education. As
23 a judge with the Virtual Enterprises International
24 and DECA, which is D-E-C-A, which prepares emerging
25 leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance,

1 hospitality, and management in high schools and
2 colleges around the globe, I have had the
3 opportunity of seeing firsthand, all of the schools
4 across the state of Illinois who participates in
5 these activities. Before COVID-19 the competitions
6 took place at Rosemont Hotel, which hosted thousands
7 of high school students across the state of
8 Illinois. This network is also part of curriculums
9 in colleges and universities across the country.
10 However, the Chicago public schools do not
11 participate in this educational and beneficial
12 competition that requires in-school educational
13 curriculum participation. Funding for participation
14 is supported by ISBE. However, CPS chooses not to
15 participate, which narrows our students' access to
16 more opportunities that broadens their scope of
17 education and helps prepare them for college and
18 life after college. It also narrow -- narrows
19 career opportunities, entrepreneurialism,
20 entrepreneurial exploration, and other educational
21 opportunities. This is one main reason why we do
22 not see regular -- a regular increase in Black-owned
23 businesses on the West and South Side of Chicago.
24 With a broader curriculum that supports programs,
25 such as Virtual Enterprises International and DECA,

1 we will see a burst of young entrepreneurs and those
2 graduating with master degrees from colleges and
3 universities. In closing, I truly support
4 increasing the number of board members to 21, that
5 will allow Black and brown communities to have more
6 control over our children's education. Thank you,
7 Leader Kimberly Lightford.

8 MS. LIGHTFORD: Thanks, Tina. Tina would be on
9 our list as our final speaker. Is there someone
10 seeking to speak who have not spoken or signed in at
11 this time? Okay, so as we wrap things up for this
12 evening, I want to thank all of the witnesses who
13 shared their insights and their expertise with us
14 during these hearings over the last several weeks.
15 You know your community's best, and you've given us
16 a lot to consider as we move forward. Before we
17 adjourn on this evening, I want to make it clear
18 that this will not be the last chance to provide
19 input on district boundaries. I mentioned our
20 website earlier and want to give that address once
21 again, it's www.ilsenate.com, S- E- N- A- T- E,
22 redistricting, R- E- D- I- S- T- R- I- C- T- I- N- G.com.
23 At that site, we have a map-making portal where you
24 can draw communities of interest and upload proposed
25 district boundaries. We've already had several

1 submissions which are available for review at the
2 General Assemblies website, which is www.ilga.gov.
3 I also expect this committee will be reconvening
4 before too long and look forward to continuing these
5 conversations at that time. Thank you-all, be well.
6 And with there being no further business to come
7 before the Senate Special Committee on Chicago
8 Elected Representative School Board, we are
9 adjourned. Thank you so much, have a great night.

10 MS. WILLIAMS: Bye, Ms. Lightford.

11 MS. LIGHTFORD: Bye. Thanks for joining us.
12 Thank you for your testimony, Yolanda.

13 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

14 MS. LIGHTFORD: Good night, Ms. Natasha.
15 You still there, Marc?

16 COURT REPORTER: Ms. Jenkins, will I be needed
17 for anything further, ma'am?

18 CLERK: (Inaudible).

19 COURT REPORTER: Thank you, ma'am. Have a good
20 night. Thank you, Senators.

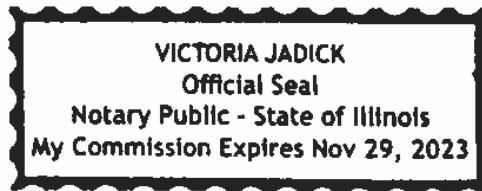
21 CLERK: Thank you.

22 (HEARING CONCLUDED AT 8:41 P.M. (CT))
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF ILLINOIS

I do hereby certify that the witness in the foregoing transcript was taken on the date, and at the time and place set out on the Stipulation page hereof by me after first being duly sworn to testify the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and that the said matter was recorded by me digitally and then reduced to typewritten form under my direction, and constitutes a true record of the transcript as taken, all to the best of my skills and ability. I certify that I am not a relative or employee of either counsel, and that I am in no way interested financially, directly or indirectly, in this action.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Victoria Jadick".

VICTORIA JADICK

COURT REPORTER/NOTARY

COMMISSION EXPIRES ON: 11/29/2023

SUBMITTED ON: 04/25/2023

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