



Testimony to the Senate Special Committee on the Chicago Elected Representative School Board

Submitted by Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago

April 17, 2023

Good evening. My name is Ricky Gandhi, and I am the Political Director at Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago (“Advancing Justice | Chicago”). Thank you to Chair Lightford and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify.

The Asian American community is the fastest-growing racial demographic in Chicago, Illinois, and the country overall. In Chicago, the Asian American population grew by 31% from 2010 to 2020. While the Greater Chinatown area has the highest Asian American density in Chicago, it is not the only area with significant Asian American communities. West Ridge, Albany Park, Uptown, Edgewater, UIC, and the Near West Side also have Asian American population density.

This is why Advancing Justice | Chicago strongly urges the committee to create at least four Asian American influence districts and to preserve Asian American communities of interest in the new school board map. Assuming the final map contains 20 districts, we believe it is possible to draw at least two districts that are more than 19% Asian American and two districts that are more than 11% Asian American, based on voting age population. If it is possible to draw an Asian American majority district, we urge the committee to create one. Our proposed districts can be viewed [at this link](#). These districts also contain significant non-Asian immigrant communities, which share many of the same issues and struggles that Asian American communities face, such as language barriers, lack of citizenship, and xenophobia. As such, advocating on behalf of Asian Americans will benefit other immigrant communities as well.

The first district is comprised of Chinatown, Bridgeport, South Loop, McKinley Park, and Brighton Park, and would be 24.7% Asian American, 33.4% Latino, and 13.4% Black. Notably, Chicago’s Chinatown neighborhood is the only growing Chinatown in the entire country, and many Chinese Americans live in the neighboring areas of Bridgeport, South Loop, McKinley Park, and Brighton Park. Our proposed map also attempts to take into account the attendance boundaries for the local high schools. Roughly a third of Phillips High School, a majority of Kelly High School, and about half of the Tilden High School boundaries are included in this district.

The second district combines West Ridge, North Park, and Albany Park, and would be 19.5% Asian American, 29.9% Latino, and 6.5% Black. West Ridge has a vibrant South Asian business corridor and community that is centered on Devon Avenue. Albany Park also has a historically Asian American business corridor along Lawrence Avenue, with many Korean, Filipino, and

South Asian business owners and residents choosing to make Albany Park their home. This district contains nearly all of the Mather High School attendance boundary and a vast majority of the Roosevelt High School attendance boundary.

The third district runs along the North Side lakefront, combining Rogers Park, Edgewater, and Uptown, and would be 11.5% Asian American, 16.4% Latino, and 19.3% Black. Uptown is home to the Argyle business corridor, also known as “Asia on Argyle,” which has many Southeast Asian-owned restaurants and small businesses. Rogers Park and Edgewater also have notable Asian American populations, along with other immigrant and refugee communities. This district contains the entire Sullivan High School attendance boundary and the vast majority of the Senn High School attendance boundary.

The fourth district would combine the Loop, Streeterville, Greektown, UIC, and the Near West Side, and would be 14.6% Asian American, 6.9% Latino, and 12.6% Black. Voting age population estimates showed the possibility of drawing another district with an Asian American population greater than 10%, so we have included this district in our proposal. This district would contain almost all of the Wells High School attendance boundary, along with small portions of neighboring high school boundaries.

Keeping Asian American communities together is important because Asian Americans have long faced discrimination and continue to do so, as we have seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, the Asian American community has been underrepresented in all forms of government. Keeping our communities together in a single district, rather than divided across multiple districts, will allow Asian American voters to have a greater say in school board elections and will help ensure that school board members are accountable to Asian American voters’ priority issues and concerns.

Advancing Justice | Chicago drew these four districts in consultation with Asian American community organizations. Our map is supported by the Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment, Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, HANA Center, Indo-American Center, Muslim Civic Coalition, and South Asian American Policy & Research Institute.

Regarding process, we urge the committee to prioritize transparency and create additional opportunities to provide public input. Members of the public deserve to provide meaningful feedback *after* a draft map is made public, so that public input can be incorporated into future revisions.



In conclusion, as Asians continue to face discrimination and lack representation in government, it is vital they have a voice in electing their school board members. Advancing Justice | Chicago calls for the committee to create, at minimum, the four Asian American influence districts outlined above and to preserve these communities of interest in the new school board map.

Thank you again for your time.

Proposed Districts: <https://districtr.org/plan/181349>

