



Contact:
Martín Klein
Legislative Staff Attorney
(312) 427-0701; mklein@maldef.org

Public Hearing Testimony
Illinois Senate Special Committee on the
Chicago Elected Representative School Board
April 13, 2023

Madam Chair Lightford, Co-Chairs Aquino and Martwick, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Martín Klein, and I am a staff attorney with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. MALDEF is a national civil rights law firm. For over 50 years, MALDEF has worked to protect the voting rights of Latinos through community education, advocacy and litigation. Our organization has been involved in Illinois redistricting since the 1980s. We regularly partnered with stakeholders representing diverse communities, developed model maps, and monitored the state's compliance with minority voting rights, particularly the Voting Rights Act.

We thank the committee for providing this opportunity to comment on the electoral districts for the Chicago Board of Education.

The Latino community is the fastest growing minority group in Illinois and Chicago; and they send their kids to Chicago Public Schools. Latinos are about 29.8% of Chicago's total population and about 27.2% of the City's voting age population. Chicago Public Schools reports that 46.6% of the school district's students are Latino. Chicago Public Schools also reports that 72.7% of their students are Economically Disadvantaged Students, coming from low income households; and 22.4% of Chicago Public Students are bilingual or English

Language Learners, suggesting they are from immigrant households. Ensuring that Latino communities have the power to elect candidates of their choice that will have influence reflective of their numbers, and school board members responsive to the needs of their children is a civil right.

We urge the committee to consider the growth of the Latino community, their needs to meaningfully participate, and provide additional opportunities for grassroots organizations and community members to provide input on the process for drawing the electoral districts for the Chicago Board of Education. As of now, the Senate Special Committee hearings have only had one meeting at 6:00 pm and with the opportunity for virtual participation by the community, whereas four hearings have been scheduled at 4:00 pm on weekdays without the opportunity for virtual participation by members of the community. This schedule may not be accessible to members of the general public. Further, with a substantial population of immigrant and limited English Proficient families directly impacted by the outcome of this process, we urge the Committee consider providing interpretation for future hearings. And finally, as the Special Committee develops proposed maps for consideration, we ask that the committee specifically describe the data and data sources that are being considered so that advocates and the general public be provided ample opportunity to review, analyze, and provide meaningful recommendations for the Special Committee.

In order for members of the public to have an effective voice in the process, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Hold additional hearings or provide other forums for community input on evenings and weekends, and scheduled at least two-weeks in advance and be widely publicized
2. Offer interpretation in some of the hearings to allow the impacted community to participate.
3. Provide at least two weeks between releasing proposed maps and holding a hearing to consider proposed maps, so the public can provide the Special Committee with meaningful feedback.

The Latino community has historically experienced voting discrimination and attempts to dilute the effectiveness of their votes. The Chicago Board of Education electoral districts must take into account the need to overcome the lingering effects of discrimination and offer minority voters an equal opportunity to elect their candidates of choice. New district boundaries should fairly reflect minority voting strength and not seek to minimize or dilute the minority vote.

Thank you for your time.