



## CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Transparent and Accountable Redistricting

*Illinois Senate Subcommittee on Redistricting for Northern Illinois*

*To: Chair Steve Stadelman and committee members*

*From: Ryan Tolley, Policy Director of CHANGE Illinois*

Thank you Chair Stadelman and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony about the remapping process for Illinois state and congressional districts. My name is Ryan Tolley and I am the Policy Director of CHANGE Illinois and the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund. Both are nonpartisan nonprofits that educate, engage and advocate for ethics and efficiency in governments and elections. CHANGE Illinois is a coalition and alongside our diverse partners in more than 30 organizations, we long have advocated for an independent and transparent redistricting process that results in equitable maps.

This week, we testified before the full committee and the subcommittee for DuPage about the need for a transparent and accountable map-making process. We asked very simple questions, hoping for answers that would help the public better understand how to engage in this year's remapping process. Illinoisans across the state want and need a transparent and independent process. A survey conducted by CHANGE Illinois last year found that 75 percent of Illinois voters support independent redistricting. A proposal we have introduced with Sen. Melinda Bush, SB2554, would help meet these demands from people across the state.

The questions we asked need to be answered if we expect people to participate in shaping their districts in a meaningful way. I am not alone in my concerns about how these hearings are proceeding already. If this continues, lawmakers will not meet the goals of an inclusive process that allow communities to guide it. We scrambled, on short notice, to try to ensure that people in Northern Illinois were aware that this hearing is taking place. And we weren't even aware of what area this committee oversaw until we learned yesterday that the Senate has put together a map with the regions outlined. What is evident from only a handful of people being here to testify is that not nearly enough is being done by staff and lawmakers to ensure awareness, transparency and a meaningful opportunity for people to engage.

If this process is truly meant to be inclusive, then what steps were taken to ensure that the public was made aware? What additional steps were taken to make sure that historically disenfranchised communities were made aware of today's hearing to talk about their representation? How was this hearing communicated to those communities? What steps were taken to ensure that language access is not an impediment to people's ability to participate? Posting notice on government websites clearly will not be enough to reach historically marginalized communities.



[www.changeil.org](http://www.changeil.org)

 @changeil

There were a number of community and good government organizations whose representatives testified this week and all of us, independently, said these committee meetings need more transparency. People need to understand what data lawmakers are using to draw maps and what versions of these redistricting committees they are supposed to engage with.

In order to meet these challenges, our proposal, SB2554, is a plan that would ensure more equitable and transparent maps than those of the past. We ask that the committee implement these necessary reforms immediately:

- Hold a minimum of 35 hearings, well publicized, that not only give people a chance to testify but ensure that their feedback is being responded to and considered in map proposals.
- Implement fairness standards that prioritize compliance with the Federal Voting Rights Act and the Illinois Voting Rights Act to make certain that communities of color have the opportunity to elect their preferred candidates. And require that mappers respect communities of interest and geographic boundaries that already exist. Most importantly, Illinoisans do not want maps that either favor or punish incumbents.
- It's good to hear a website has been established that makes public all information used in the remapping process. That web address must be advertised extensively. The website should include testimony, map submissions by the public, proposals being drafted by the committee, and all other documents and communications relevant to its work. A compliance report must be issued with any map proposal describing how the plan meets requirements in the Federal Voting Rights Act. The report must respond to testimony and maps submitted by the public.
- Establish a period between the introduction of the proposed maps and votes by the chambers to ensure that additional public hearings are held and the public has the time to understand and respond to proposed maps *before votes*.
- Fix the implementation date of the recently enacted No Representation Without Population Act, a law that will end prison gerrymandering. The newly enacted law still deprives representation for those who are incarcerated for another decade.

The purpose of today's hearing was not clear beforehand. Should people have been prepared to present testimony on what the districts in their area should look like? Should they have their community of interest map proposals ready for the subcommittee? Based on what data? Or is the hearing simply to talk about how the committee will conduct itself over the next few months? Will this subcommittee follow the same process as the other subcommittees or will each committee be free to conduct itself differently without any uniform rules? None of the answers to these questions has been made clear, making it even more difficult for people to participate in the redrawing of their districts in a meaningful way.

It is imperative that more information be provided about how these hearings will be conducted, what will be discussed, and that even greater notice is given to the public so people know how to participate. Consider making the invitation list public and advertise these meetings in the media.

You have a responsibility to make it abundantly clear to the public they can participate. Our recommendation would be for subcommittees to postpone meetings so leaders can define what data will be used and so that general guidelines and uniform rules are established to ensure members of the public have ample time to prepare to participate and to incorporate more transparency and accountability into the process.



[www.changeil.org](http://www.changeil.org)

 [@changeil](https://twitter.com/changeil)

Illinois' districts belong to the people and they have made clear they expect an independent and transparent process that values the principle of one person, one vote. We urge you to meet their clear expectations.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to try to answer any questions that committee members might have.

Ryan Tolley  
Policy Director  
CHANGE Illinois



---

[www.changeil.org](http://www.changeil.org)

 [@changeil](https://twitter.com/changeil)