

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COOK COUNTY COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING
BY
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My name is Ann P. Kalayil and I live in Lincolnwood, IL and currently a member of the 13th District Redistricting Task Force and President of the South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI). I would like to thank Committee Chair Debra Sims and Commissioner Larry Suffredin for allowing me this opportunity to provide input here today on the redistricting. Redistricting is an important issue for Asian Americans and often we are a community that remains missing in the narrative. During the past 3-4 decades census data shows that the Asian American population in Illinois has significantly increased and today is the fastest growing population in Illinois as well as nationally -more than any group. Based on ACS data Asian Americans make up 5.7% of Illinois' population and the South Asian American community remains the largest group within this number. In Cook County, the Asian American community has significantly grown especially in districts 10, 13 and 15.

I am here today to speak about the 13th district and to tell you how Asian Americans in this district are a community of interest. And why is it important that we not be fragmented across county districts. As immigrants, we also have many similarities with groups like Assyrians and Middle Easterners because we face similar issues of integration.

My testimony today focuses on the community in the Devon Avenue Area (West Ridge), located in the north side of Chicago, and the neighboring suburbs of Lincolnwood and Skokie. Together West Ridge in Chicago, Lincolnwood and Skokie comprise a population that is a community of interest. The Asian American population in each of these areas has increased since 1990, and now comprises of more than 20% in each of these areas.

Asian Americans in this community share social, economic and political interests. Because of the cultural and social continuity of the people in these areas, they comprise a "community of interest" that should be recognized in the redistricting process.

The Asian Americans in these share similar income levels, educational backgrounds, and housing patterns, and other common issues of concern. These include immigration (family reunification), affordable housing, access to healthcare, education and victims of hate crimes. Many of the residents are at least a two income family, working at more than one job, and with extended family members who live with them also being employed, and grandparents take care of their grandchildren while their parents work. Language barriers prevent new immigrants from having an understanding of many issues such as immigration, public benefits, and health care, and community centers, like the Indo-American Center and Asian Human Services, assist immigrants in their new country. The growth in the Asian American population has resulted in the opening of many new businesses, jobs and economic development in these areas. New immigrants live in the area because they have easy access to transportation, and ethnic grocery stores and restaurants. They then move into Skokie, Lincolnwood and Niles as they become economically better. These are some examples of how the Asian American community share social characteristics and have a shared interest in outcomes of policy deliberations in Cook County government.

We believe that the new county districts should not fragment these Asian American voters into numerous county districts, rather need to empower them. An example of how a community of interest can be empowered is evident in the recent elections in Lincolnwood, where you have an Asian American, Jesal Patel was elected as Mayor and increased representation of Asian American in trustees; this outcome was made possible through a coalition of Asian Americans, Assyrians and other Middle Eastern voters. I urge you to consider drawing county districts that keep communities of interests together and help new immigrants find their voice in the political process. Thank you.