

Testimony of Lloyd Johnston – President of the NAACP Rockford Branch;  
Norma Joseph – Secretary of the NAACP Illinois State Conference -  
Senate and House Redistricting Committee.

Date: 19 April, 2011

I am here to today to represent the NAACP Illinois State Conference, with its 37 branches throughout the State of Illinois. Like others in this room, the members of the NAACP are extremely concerned with the redistricting process.

Allow me to proceed by stating that we do believe that the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011 (IVRA) promises a fair redistricting process for all racial minorities, if it is properly implemented. We have read the IVRA to require the legislature to create a “crossover,” “coalition” or “influence” district where it is not feasible to create a majority-minority district, and where doing so is otherwise consistent with other redistricting edicts and the United States Constitution. The NAACP’s position is the IVRA serves as a protection against the gerrymandering of the black vote. Thus our first minimum prerequisite for a fair redistricting process is that the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011 be followed.

However, for a vote to be meaningful, it must also be effective; and as stated by the African Americans for Legislative Redistricting, a vote is only as effective as the boundaries of the district in which it is cast. We too believe that the 2001 mapping was effective for African American voters in Illinois, and in most instances, agree that it should be maintained. The 2001 map did help to produce the first black State Senate President in Illinois history, and did create the district from which Barack Obama launched his U.S. Senate campaign, which in turn made his presidency possible. And therefore, it is also our position that this map is something to be proud of, and that works, not only for African Americans, but it works well for the State of Illinois as a whole, and has an impact nationally as well.

Under the 2001 map, black state legislators have chaired important committees such as Insurance, Elementary and Secondary Education Appropriations, Small Business Empowerment and Workforce, Housing, Financial Institutions, Revenue, Health and Human Services, and Pensions and Investments. Throughout the past decade, many of the hundreds of bills sponsored by African American legislators have had a particular focus and impact on minority communities throughout Illinois.

I would like to conclude this testimony by remarking on two other concerns. First, we understand that it is the practice in Illinois to count prison inmates as residents of the localities in which they are imprisoned. Because blacks and Latinos constitute a disproportionately high share of the state and federal prison population in Illinois, we believe this practice is harmful to minority interests in the redistricting process. Therefore, another minimum prerequisite for fair redistricting is to count inmates as residents of the locality from which they have come, and to which most of them return.

This is the current practice in other large, racially diverse states such as Maryland and New York. It is inequitable to return them to communities without the resources to assist them in a successful reintegration, which proves harmful to all of the residents in these communities, and ultimately our society as a whole, and we strongly urge that this policy be changed.

Finally, although we also are aware that the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011 does not expressly apply to Congressional redistricting, we assert that the same discretion afforded to the states does apply to Congressional redistricting as well. We believe, as a final minimum prerequisite for fair redistricting, that the legislature should apply the basic framework of the IVRA to its Congressional redistricting.

The NAACP is looking forward to participating in future hearings. We thank you for your time.