

**Testimony to the Illinois House Redistricting Committee
Regarding the Boundaries of Illinois' Legislative Districts**

**Submitted by Yesenia Sanchez, Lead Community Organizer
with P.A.S.O.- West Suburban Action Project
Monday, April 25th 2011**

Good morning Chairman, members of the IL House Redistricting Committee,

My name is Yesenia Sanchez, lead community organizer with P.A.S.O.- West Suburban Action Project. I am also a resident of Franklin Park, IL.

P.A.S.O.- West Suburban Action Project is a non-partisan, non-profit community organization that works to engage community members to act through their faith and values to address issues that affect them, their families, and neighbors with the mission to build stronger communities.

P.A.S.O. uses the unique model of community organizing, leadership development, and civic engagement as tools for members to develop the skills to be active, engaged participants in their communities. Some of the issues P.A.S.O. works around are immigrant rights, education and public safety. P.A.S.O. is an institution-based organization, that includes Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Shrine, St. Charles Borromeo, St. John Vianney, and St. Simeon parishes as well as Nuestra Voz Youth Council. We serve the West Cook Suburbs including the areas of Stone Park, Maywood, Bellwood, Melrose Park, Northlake and Franklin Park.

We have been working with the Illinois Latino Agenda, a 49-member coalition of Latino nonprofit organizations to protect the voting rights of Latino residents and to increase their ability to elect candidates of their choice through the development of new legislative boundaries across the state.

I join this hearing today because of the importance of the redistricting process to the communities we serve, and specifically regarding the need in the creation of new House legislative boundaries that keep key communities of interest together in a majority Latino district that includes the areas of Melrose Park, Stone Park, Maywood, Northlake, Franklin Park, Desplaines, Mount Prospect, Bensenville and Addison. Such map has been submitted by the Latino Policy Forum on behalf of the Illinois Latino Agenda.

The dramatic increase in Latino population growth in these areas must be accompanied by new legislative district boundaries that enable greater Latino representation in the Illinois General Assembly. It is also of great importance that communities with shared interests be able to select candidates that reflect their priorities and have an opportunity to hold them accountable for their actions.

As stated under the U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965, minority voting rights cannot be diluted where a majority minority district can be created. Furthermore, under the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011, minority communities are also protected in the creation of influence, coalition and cross-over districts. Our community is protected under both of these laws and we will be watching the legislature and this process to ensure that these laws are followed.

Currently these communities are split amongst several legislative districts, though once these districts are connected, they conform over 60% Latino population. These areas are currently divided by 4 House Districts- 77, 78, 65 and 46th. It is crucial to create a district in these areas that is contiguous and allows for the Latino population to be compact within it, with a fair representation that does not dilute the Latino voting power within this region.

Of particular significance, over the last 10 years these communities have seen an increase and shift in the Latino population. The recent 2010 Census data shows the percentages for Latino populations in the following communities are as follows: Melrose Park 69.6% , Stone Park 88.1%, Maywood 20.8%, Northlake 52.9%, Franklin Park 43.1%, Mount Prospect 15.5%, Bensenville 47.8%, and Addison with 40.1% Latino population.

Within the Latino population, the majority is composed of Mexican descent, with these key communities of interest sharing a variety of social and economic characteristics.

Furthermore, these key communities of interest already have shared interests and community networks. For instance, our organization has worked with faith-institutions in the areas encompassing Melrose Park all the way to Franklin Park, particularly on issues of immigrant rights and civic engagement. There are key churches and institutions where community members convene and gather that have a long history of working together on these issues, yet currently they are divided by several legislative districts.

In addition, through doing direct outreach in these communities, we have found they also shared similar challenges including access to education, language barriers, and lack of information to government agencies and access to quality services. Being divided by 4 legislative districts does not help these communities of interest to be able to address these issues effectively.

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that these communities are interconnected, and especially share demographics that create the necessity to insure a majority Latino district. The ties these communities have established include economic prosperity as is visible in the Latino-owned businesses located in Melrose Park and Maywood (along Lake street corridor and 19th Ave.) , Stone Park (along Manheim avenue), and Franklin Park (along Franklin Ave). These businesses have insured local prosperity of the communities where they are located and thus should be able to stay contiguous and interconnected by a district that fairly represents them.

In closing, it is important that the communities of interest that include Melrose Park, Stone Park, Maywood, Northlake, Franklin Park, Desplaines, Mount Prospect, Bensenville and Addison are included within the new boundaries of a new majority-Latino House district that insures the fair representation of this community.

All Illinoisans deserve an opportunity to view and comment on maps being considered by the General Assembly before they are voted upon. P.A.S.O.- West Suburban Action Project calls on the members of this committee to schedule an additional set of public hearings after maps have been drafted by the legislature. Furthermore, we ask that the public comment period last at least 2 weeks prior to legislative votes. Given that advocates will be sharing their preferred maps with you throughout the remainder of this process, I respectfully ask that you show us your maps as well so we can insure a fair process.

Should you have further questions, I can be reached at 708-345-3632 Ext. 302/ 708-612-2029 (cell) or yesenia.sanchez.olmc@gmail.com. I will be available for further comment as this process unfolds.

Supporting Allies:

Fr. Claudio Holzer, Pastor Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Shrine (Melrose Park) and Dean of Vicariate IV- Deanery B encompassing 14 parishes including Melrose Park and Northlake

Sincerely,

Yesenia Sanchez

Lead Community Organizer, P.A.S.O.- West Suburban Action Project

Springfield 4/25/2011