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By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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**The Redistricting Hearings Are Held in the Heels of the Signing by Gov. Pat Quinn of the New Illinois Voting Rights Act.**

CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – Chinese- and Indian-American leaders led Asian Americans in testifying before the Senate Redistricting Committee last Monday (March 28) at the Sen. Belandic Building at 160 N. La Salle St. in downtown Chicago in the first of five hearings across the state that will redraw maps that will give minorities a chance to be given their own districts.

“We have been waiting 10 years for this moment,” said C.W. Chan, chairman of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community. “In fact CBCAC was involved in spearheading redistricting efforts for Chinatown over a decade ago. This time around, the group is determined

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to achieve a more favorable outcome.”

Attorney Ami Gandhi, legal director of Asian-American Institute, urged the Illinois General Assembly to give meaningful consideration to the input of Asian Americans at this stage in redistricting and also after draft maps are released but before they are voted on.”

The AAI, a pan-Asian non-profit, non-partisan organization in Chicago whose mission is to empower the Asian American community through advocacy, research, education, and coalition building also includes legal advocacy, community organizing and leadership development. A member of national Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, AAI counts Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment headed by Dr. Juanita Salvador-Burriss as one of its group members. Dr. Burriss was one of the Filipino Americans, who witnessed the half-day hearing.

David Wu, executive director of Pui Tak Center, described some of the effects of the failed redistricting effort a decade ago. An area densely populated with more than 18,000 Chinese Americans was divided up into four state representative districts, four wards, three state senate districts, and three congressional districts.

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Mr. Wu told the committee that having small constituencies in multiple districts means that elected officials are not responsive to the community's needs. "Chinatown needs a champion who will stand up and fight for what our community needs."

## **Chinese Population in Chicago's China Town**

Theresa Mah, an Asian-American Studies professor and policy consultant for CBCAC, testified that the Chinese population around Chinatown, encompassing Armour Square, Bridgeport, South Loop

,  
McKinley  
Park  
, and portions of  
Brighton  
Park

, has grown by more-than 50% since the 2000 census. Dr. Mah presented the committee with maps based on current census figures and introduced the "Greater Chinatown Community Area," which has been designated by CBCAC as the area it hopes will be kept together in the remapping process.

In her testimony, Mah stated that the area "is bounded by the Chicago River and Stevenson Expressway on the north, Kedzie to the west, Pershing for the most part on the south, and Michigan and Indiana Avenues to the East up to Polk Street at its very northern tip." The total population living in this community area is more-than 89,000 people, of whom 30% are Asian.

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Bernarda Wong, President of the Chinese-American Service League, said that the “Greater Chinatown Community Area” is unquestionably a community of interest. Wong presented committee members with a map showing CASL and Pui Tak Center clients and staff residences spread throughout the Community Area. “The Greater Chinatown Community Area is a vibrant and cohesive community,” Wong said. “Its interests are not served by being split into multiple districts as it is currently.”

CBCAC’s efforts in the redistricting process will continue with testimony at upcoming hearings as well, where further details about the “Greater Chinatown Community Area” will be presented along with a proposal for a state house district that will include this area.

The committee presided over by Sen. Kwame Raoul, chairperson of the Senate Redistricting Committee, held the redistricting hearing in the heels of the signing by Gov. Pat Quinn of the new Illinois Voting Rights Act.

“The new Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011 provides us with a powerful tool to protect the voting rights of our community. Even though, we may come from different countries, there are many cultural and social similarities between our groups,” according to Kiran Siddiqui, executive director of the Hamdard Center for Health and Human Services. “Our community is united by our common immigrant histories, income levels and access to services.”

According to Illinois Constitution (Art. IV, Sec. 3) and U.S. Constitution (Art. I, Sec. 2), the Illinois General Assembly must redraw the boundaries of Illinois

’ congressional, legislative and representative districts in order to account for population shifts

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since the 2000 census.

Senator Raoul is seeking information from interests groups throughout the state in order to facilitate the redistricting process and ensure full public participation. He is inviting groups to submit information about their organizations and the community they serve or represent.

Others who testified were Harendra Mangrola of the Indian-American community, vice president of Sumit Construction; Rabya Khan of the Muslim and South Asian communities; Xavier Roman of the Hispanic community and representative of the West Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) headed by Karl Brinson.

Since 2000, the Asian-American population in Illinois has grown by 39% and has become one of the fastest-growing populations in the state while most other races have seen an overall decline.

Attorney Gandhi said in areas such as Greater Chinatown, Greater West Ridge (including portions of West Ridge, Devon Avenue, West Rogers Park, North Park, Albany Park, and other neighborhoods and portions of suburban Cook County, Asian Americans, including Filipinos, make up over 25% of the population. In Du Page County, Asian Americans compose 10% of the population. # # #

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