

Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee

March 28 2011

Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Kiran Siddiqui and currently I am the Executive Director of Hamdard Center for Health and Human services, a non for profit specializing in providing social and primary care services to the South Asian population in the Rogers Park, Edgewater, Skokie and other outlying areas. I was also the program director of Apna Ghar, the only South Asian domestic violence shelter in Cook County, for 5 years. I have been providing social services to the South Asian community for the past 12 years, which have included case management, counseling and advocacy. For eleven years, I was a resident of Skokie, and I have been a resident of Morton Grove for the last ten years.

I am deeply involved in the south Asian community of Morton Grove and I have seen the growth of the immigrant and south Asian community increase dramatically. As background, when I say "south Asian," I am referring to a subgroup within Asian Americans that includes people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and Bhutanese descent. Even though we come from different countries, there are many cultural and social similarities between our groups.

There are more and more businesses in my area owned and operated by South Asians, like grocery stores, salons and daycares. In Morton Grove, my daughter attends the Muslim Education Center which has a large percentage of South Asian students enrolled and its Sunday school also has a large percentage of South Asian students enrolled. The Village of Skokie has reported that approximately 56% of public school students speak a language other than English at home, and of these languages, the largest categories are Urdu or Spanish (between 2004 and 2010, Urdu and Spanish have gone back and forth as the first and second top languages spoken at home by Skokie students, other than English). Niles West High school that serves Skokie, Niles and parts of Morton Grove has an enrollment of approximately 2500 students and Asians make up the second highest race enrolled. And

according to 2010 data released by the Illinois State Board of Education, in the areas of Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles, and Lincolnwood, there are at least 10 school districts where Asians make up over 25% of the enrollment. This shows that many students and families in these areas have unique concerns that need to be addressed effectively by the elected officials who represent them.

Members of the committee, I am invested in this community. I have been living in this community for the last 21 years and I have seen the growth of the south Asian population in Morton Grove, Niles and Skokie. We have built a mosque that serves over 500 people and nearly 85% of them are South Asian. And many of these South Asian members come to Hamdard Center for services as we are the closest multi comprehensive social service agency. My staff members reflect the community and speak 6 different south Asian languages (including Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujrati, Telegu, and Malayalam) to accommodate clients' many complex needs. Hamdard has a domestic violence shelter that is sensitive to the needs of South Asian victims of domestic violence; just as one example, we can be sensitive to Muslim clients by providing them with Halal meat. Because of our unique understanding and the comfort we can provide, many south Asian victims have to stay with us longer thereby forcing us to turn away an average of over 200 women and children each year. Hamdard Center is a beacon of services for many immigrants and refugees and we serve over 2000 clients, in spite of state budget cuts, which has been an average of 10% to my agency for the last 2 years.

Hamdard Center is a sister agency to other Asian and South Asian agencies like Indo-American Center, Asian American Institute, Apna Ghar, Metropolitan Asian Family Services, Muslim Women Resource Center, and Korean American Women in Need (KAN-WIN), and we share many of the same concerns. We have collaborated on many projects including the US Census 2010 outreach, when 4 of the agencies mentioned above were Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) for the Census. This example shows you the cohesiveness of the partnership between the many Asian and South Asian institutions in Cook County. Our concern is that we all serve Asian and South Asian clients from Skokie,

Niles and Morton Grove, yet there is a stark lack of Asian or South Asian elected officials serving this growing community. According to Census 2010, Illinois' Asian population was the fastest growing in the state, swelling in the collar counties. Yet there is not even one publicly elected state official that reflects this dramatic shift. Currently myself and my sister agencies would agree with me that we have to go to several different elected officials to get our problems addressed which our clients bring to us. This is a huge hindrance to us as well as our clients, and we want this committee to be fair when reviewing district lines. District lines have a real impact on whether we as minorities can participate in government and make a positive difference in our communities. It is important that my community be grouped together so that we can elect candidates of our choice who can be responsive to our needs. Our community is united not just by race but also by many other socioeconomic factors that we have in common, such as income and access to services.

As a South Asian who has worked for the South Asian population for the last 12 years and as a South Asian who has lived in Skokie/Morton Grove for the last 21 years, I am heavily invested in the process of redistricting and would like to appeal to the members to keep this process transparent. We as Asian Americans want to be treated fairly during the redistricting process. Hamdard Center is working with AAI to create maps with specific boundaries, and we will give those to you soon.

Thank you for your time.

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