



Testimony of

Virginia Martinez

Legislative Staff Attorney

Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund

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Senate Redistricting Committee

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Chairman Raoul and members of the Senate Redistricting Committee, thank you for allowing MALDEF to present testimony today as the Illinois legislature embarks on the critical and highly controversial process of redrawing the Congressional and legislative district lines. My name is Virginia Martinez, Legislative Staff Attorney with MALDEF, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Also here today is Elisa Alfonso, Midwest Redistricting Coordinator. We'd like to update you on our efforts as well as our concerns as this process moves forward.

MALDEF is a national civil rights law firm that works to safeguard the rights of the 50 million Latinos in the United States. MALDEF has worked to protect the voting rights of Latinos through advocacy and, when necessary, litigation since its founding in 1968, and particularly in Illinois since the 1980's.

As in the past, we are working to develop a map that protects the rights of the more than 2 million Latinos now living in Illinois. As you are aware, the Latino population grew significantly during the past 10 years. Much of that growth was in the collar counties. We are currently in the process of educating these Latino communities about the redistricting process and are consulting them as we look at potential districts. As co-convener of the Illinois Latino Agenda, made up of almost 40 community-based organizations, we have established a Redistricting Committee to ensure that Latino communities have a voice in this important process.

Additionally, MALDEF is a member of the Draw the Line Illinois project of the Illinois Campaign for Accountable Redistricting which has as its goal to inform and engage the public in the redistricting process. This coalition of community-based, reform

and civil rights organizations is providing communities with the information and tools to be fully engaged in the 2011 redistricting.

MALDEF seeks to ensure that elected officials adequately protect the rights of Latinos, particularly in areas that have seen substantial growth in the Latino population. The Voting Rights Act will be the lens through which we will view your efforts.

In order for members of the Latino community to have an effective voice in the redistricting process, we will have to see the maps developed by the relevant legislative committees with enough time to analyze fully its impact on Latinos and other protected groups. While we appreciate the scheduling of these hearings to receive input, we think it is also critical to have hearings after the relevant legislative committees have developed their proposed maps and at least two weeks before any vote is taken. This will provide us with time to review the maps for compliance with the federal and state Voting Rights Acts. Without such an opportunity the promise of a more transparent process is meaningless.

We expect to testify again before the Committee to discuss our proposed map after consulting with various community leaders about the political cohesiveness and shared interests of neighborhoods including income levels, educational backgrounds, housing patterns, language and meaningful access to educational opportunities that bind these communities together. Some of these community leaders are here today and will testify in future hearings regarding the communities of interest that must be protected.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today.