

# Redistricting in Illinois

**by Aviva Miriam Patt**

Public attention to the redistricting battles of 2022 has focused on the national scene as Republicans and Democrats maneuver to take or maintain control of Congress. But there was and still is some drama surrounding local districts here in Illinois, and Decalogue has been a part of it.

Our efforts began in the spring as the state legislature held hearings on redrawing the State Senate and House districts. Decalogue's objective was to create a Jewish-influence state representative district comprising the Jewish areas of West Rogers Park, Peterson Park, Skokie, and Lincolnwood. Agudath Israel was also advocating for such a district and we collaborated on defining its borders and how to present our arguments. Agudath Israel testified early in the hearings process, explaining the reasons why it was important for the Jewish community to have a district in which we could have substantial political influence. Decalogue participated in the next round of hearings in response to the tentative map drawn by the Democratic Redistricting Committee. Our [testimony](#) was critical of the proposed map and we asked the legislature to wait for the census numbers to be released before drawing a map. Despite the same request from nearly every organization that testified, the legislature passed a map in May based on data projections from the American Community Survey.

After the census data was released in August and the map was shown to have unconstitutional variances of population, the Redistricting Committee drew a new map and scheduled additional hearings with very short notice. The public testimony was overwhelmingly against the rushed process, together with the Committee's failure to meet any of the requests of any of the non-governmental bodies that had testified. Decalogue opposed the new map, which divided the Jewish community even more than did the first map. We [asked](#) for more hearings and more time for organizations to evaluate the impact of the proposed map on their communities. We also asked for them to be given the opportunity to present their own alternative maps. Once again, despite almost unanimous opposition from all the groups that testified, the new map was passed on a party-line vote in September.

While the Democratic leadership hailed the process as the most inclusive and transparent in history, the experience for Decalogue and other civic, community, and religious groups was quite the opposite. There were indeed more hearings throughout the state than in previous redistricting years and all were also on Zoom; the legislators listened politely and thanked everyone for their participation; but it was all theater—none of the requests to keep communities together were instituted and the map that was passed is the most gerrymandered in Illinois' history.

The Republicans filed the first lawsuit, challenging the entire mapping process, followed by MALDEF challenging a few specific districts in Cook County that they claimed deprived Latinos of equal representation. The Hispanic Lawyers Association and Puerto Rican Bar Association joined the MALDEF suit. NAACP later filed a challenge to districts in the Metro East area which had diluted the Black vote. Curiously, no one challenged the reduction of African American districts by half. The United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations drew a new map, including most of what Decalogue had asked for, and was prepared to submit it if the court threw out the Democrats' map and allowed a new map to be considered. Ultimately, the three-judge panel of the U.S. District Court ruled against all the challenges, finding that racial voting patterns are not evident in Illinois.

Decalogue was more hopeful that our efforts to strengthen the Jewish influence in the 9th Judicial Subcircuit would be successful. Unlike legislative redistricting, in which legislators focus on protecting their own re-election chances, there are no incumbent judges running in subcircuits since retention races are countywide. The 9th Subcircuit is far removed from Black and Latino areas that would be struggling to maintain or increase the number of districts for their communities, so our efforts would not conflict with their objectives. Decalogue had informal discussions with a Democratic political consultant who indicated that legislative leaders would be open to our request. So, we drew a [map](#) using our proposed legislative district as a base, and added northern Evanston and the lakeshore up to the county line, Glenview, and our main territorial objective, Northbrook. We submitted [testimony](#) explaining the history of antisemitism in the legal profession and the difficulty for Jews to be elected to the bench countywide. Agudath Israel testified in favor of including Peterson Park in the 9th Subcircuit. When the legislature voted to postpone redrawing the subcircuits for the 2022 election, we presumed there would be no further action this year. Rather, the legislature surprised everyone with a proposal to increase the number of subcircuits from 15 to 20. At hearings scheduled with short notice, I gave oral testimony outlining the exact boundaries of the Jewish community that we wanted to keep together. While the new map did put Peterson Park in the same subcircuit as West Rogers Park, Skokie and Lincolnwood were inexplicably assigned to another subcircuit, dividing our community and diminishing our political voice. The election this year will be based on the old map but, starting in 2024, it will be much more difficult to elect Jewish judges.

There is one battle still being waged and this one is more hopeful. Decalogue has asked the City Council not to divide the Jewish community in the 50th ward. We submitted both oral and written [testimony](#) of the history of Jews in Chicago, specifically West Rogers Park, as well as of the challenges Jews still face as a minority in Chicago. The Jewish community as we defined it is kept intact in both the Coalition and the Rules Committee maps, so whichever is adopted, whether by the City Council or in a voter referendum, we will still have a Jewish-influence ward in Chicago.

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