

Dear Ms. Humes:

I submit this comment on the Census Bureau's proposed rule for the 2020 Census which would continue the practice of counting incarcerated individuals as residents of the municipality/district where they reside while incarcerated, rather than their home community.

When the prison population was small, this practice created little real world impact. Today, however, U.S. Census data counts more than 2 million people as though they were residents of places where they have no community ties. Not inconsequentially, the locales where they are so-called "legal residents" have no ties to them, other than benefiting from the additional political clout their incarceration provides.

In 2014, with pending legislation in the state of New Jersey, the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of NJ developed a Fact Sheet for its members and allies. It's Task Force on Criminal Justice Reform looked at a real world example of how this Census Bureau practice unfairly advantages districts where prisons exist, and disadvantages the districts which the majority of those inmates call home.

Maurice River Township (Cumberland County) is home to Southern State Prison. The Township 2010 Census population was 7,976. However, 2,040 of these individuals are inmates of the prison-- representing 25% of the Township's population. Only 63 of Southern's inmates are actually residents of Cumberland County, while the remaining 1,977 come from other NJ counties (half come from just five counties- Atlantic, Camden, Essex, Hudson and Union). Maurice River Township's.

If one looks at urban, heavily minority counties in NJ, such as Mercer (Trenton), Essex (Newark), and Camden (Camden City), the situation is reversed. Essex County is considered to be "home" for approximately 2,360 male offenders in the state. However, only 490 of these offenders are incarcerated in Essex County (Northern State Prison). This results in a loss of some 1,870 individuals who are counted as residents of the counties where they are incarcerated, rather than Essex County.

These artificially deflated population counts hold true for all of the urban counties in the state. For example, 100% of Camden County's male offenders are incarcerated in counties other than Camden because Camden County does not have any State correctional facilities. This results in a population loss, for purposes of representation at the state and federal level, of close to 1,700 citizens.

Prison-based gerrymandering:

- artificially inflates the population of areas where prisons are located; artificially deflates the population of the communities that are the inmates' true "home;"
- increases political representation in communities where prison populations lead to additional voting districts (this despite the fact that those very inmates cannot vote while they are "residing" in prison); decreases political representation in the communities that inmates called "home" prior to their incarceration, thus effectively disenfranchising these largely lower-income, urban communities of color.
- overstates key indicators of "need" -- e.g., poverty-- in communities where prisons are located, giving them an artificial advantage in accessing need-based state and federal resources; understates those very same indicators of need in

the inmates' home communities, thus artificially reducing their ability to access those same resources;

The Census Bureau's practice of counting incarcerated individuals as residents of the area in which the prison is located as long been a tool for unfair advantage to certain communities, and unfair disadvantage to (primarily) urban areas. It is way past time to end this practice, and count incarcerated individuals as residents of the municipality where they had their last legal address prior to incarceration.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, Criminal Justice Task Force of the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of NJ,