Introduction to Prison Gerrymandering and Table of Contents

The way the Census Bureau counts incarcerated people in the decennial census unintentionally undermines the constitutional principle of “one person, one vote”. The Bureau tabulates incarcerated people as if they were residents of the locations where they are confined, even though they remain legal residents of their home.

Counting incarcerated people as if they were residents of prison locations leads to a dramatic distortion of representation at local and state levels, enhancing the weight of votes cast in districts that contain prisons and diluting the voting power of everyone else. This “prison gerrymandering” also creates an inaccurate picture of community populations for research and planning purposes.

Although prison gerrymandering remains a serious issue in most parts of the U.S., significant progress toward reform has been made at the Census Bureau and at all levels of government across the country. Over 25% of US residents now live in a state, county or municipality that has formally rejected prison-based gerrymandering:

MOMENTUM IS BUILDING

No longer hidden, the problem of prison gerrymandering is on the national agenda.

- State law prohibits prison gerrymandering.
- State has passed a resolution calling on the Census Bureau to end prison gerrymandering.
- Counties, cities and school boards confirmed to have avoided prison gerrymandering.
- State law prohibits or discourages local governments from engaging in prison gerrymandering.
- States have introduced legislation abolishing prison gerrymandering.

Last update March 20, 2020  Most current version is at: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/atlas/momentum.html
In this Packet:

Introductory materials

- Fact sheet: “Ending prison gerrymandering: Improving democracy requires changing the Census Bureau’s prison count methodology”
- Fact sheet: “The Census Bureau’s Prison Miscount: It’s about political power, not funding”
- Article: “Federal Judges uphold Maryland law ending prison-based gerrymandering”
- List of organizations that support ending prison gerrymandering

News clippings on the issue

- Prison-Based Gerrymandering, by the New York Times editorial board, September 27, 2013
- Prisoners lack vote, yet they shape vote, by Jonathan Tilove, Austin-American Statesman, December 1, 2013
- Time to end prison gerrymandering in Connecticut, by Scot X. Esdaile, Hartford Courant, March 6, 2020

Resolutions and model legislation

- Example Bill: model legislation for ending prison gerrymandering in your state
  (http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/models/example.html )
- Resolutions: List of resolutions adopted by organizations and municipalities
  (http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/resolutions/ )
- Resolution: NAACP’s 2010 resolution, End “Prison-Based Gerrymandering”

For more information on prison gerrymandering, including past and current legislative efforts, state-by-state district analyses, fact sheets, and data, see http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/
Ending prison gerrymandering

Improving democracy requires changing the Census Bureau’s prison count methodology

PrisonersOfTheCensus.org

The Supreme Court’s “one person, one vote” principle requires state and local electoral districts to be redrawn each decade so that each district contains the same number of people, giving each resident the equal access to government. A long-standing flaw in the decennial census, however, counts more than two million incarcerated people in the wrong place, undermining the “one person, one vote” principle. Although incarcerated people cannot vote at correctional facility locations and remain residents of their home addresses, the Census Bureau tabulates people in prison as residents of their prison cells, not their homes. This leads state and local governments to engage in “prison gerrymandering” by drawing skewed districts that dilute the votes cast by everyone who does not live near a prison.

The problem at the state level
Crediting all of a state’s incarcerated persons to a small number of districts that contain large prisons enhances the representation of those districts and dilutes representation of everyone else in the state, distorting policy decisions statewide. In addition, using incarcerated populations — which are disproportionately Black and Latino — to pad the populations of other districts dilutes minority voting strength.

The problem at the local level
Because rural county and municipal districts are smaller than state legislative districts, prison gerrymandering can create even larger problems on the local level. For example:

- **Dysfunctional local districts.** In Anamosa Iowa, a person won a city council seat with two write-in votes, neither of which he cast. No candidates ran because 96% of his district was incarcerated in a large prison. This gave the handful of actual residents in the district 25 times as much influence on the city council as residents elsewhere in the city.

- **“Majority-minority” in name only.** Prison gerrymandering prevented African-American voters in Somerset County Maryland from electing a candidate of their choice, even though a district had been drawn for that purpose to settle a Voting Rights Act lawsuit.

States and localities are seeking more accurate data
So far, eight states — Maryland, New York, Delaware, California, Washington, Nevada, New Jersey, and Colorado — have passed legislation to use state correctional data to ensure that districts are drawn with data that counts incarcerated people at home. The laws in Maryland and New York have already been implemented and upheld by the courts; the U.S. Supreme court affirmed Maryland’s law in 2012.

Further, the legislative or executive branches in several states (such as Colorado, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia) require or encourage local governments to refuse to use prison populations as padding by modifying the Bureau’s redistricting data. In addition, more than 200 counties and municipalities independently adjust the redistricting data to avoid prison gerrymandering.

Only the Census Bureau can provide a permanent national solution
The Census Bureau has already made an important, if subtle, change. The Census Bureau agreed to publish prison count data earlier than in the past, in order to assist states and counties with reallocating or removing incarcerated populations during the 2010 redistricting process, and for 2020 will release the data even earlier, bundling the prison count with the traditional (PL 94-171) redistricting data.

Ideally, the U.S. Census Bureau will count incarcerated people as residents of their legal home addresses and not as residents of the correctional facilities. The Census Bureau should, as part of their research and planning agenda for the 2030 Census, determine the best and most economical way to properly count incarcerated people as residents of their home communities.
Most funding formulas are too sophisticated to be fooled by the prison miscount

It is important that the Census counts everyone. Census population determines how legislative districts are drawn and places a major role in how federal funds are distributed. But where incarcerated people are counted has very little effect on those funding distributions for two reasons:

First, the majority of federal funding is in the form of block grants to states, so it does not matter where in any given state an incarcerated person is counted.

Second, most other funding programs are quite sophisticated and the funding distributions are calculated in ways that directly or indirectly ignore prison populations. For example, federal funds intended for low-income schools are based not on the total population counted for the area but rather on the number of low-income children counted in the Census or the number of students in a school’s discounted lunch program. Therefore, a large prison near a school would not increase funding to the school district.

The rare funding programs that are skewed by prison populations tend to be very small, and focused solely on distributions within particular regions. For example, total population plays a minor part in the grants distributed by the Appalachian Regional Commission in a way that gives communities with a prison a slightly larger share of the available funds, and similarly situated rural communities without prisons receive less. Communities that are outside the eligible Appalachian counties are entirely unaffected.

Further, state legislation ending prison gerrymandering could never affect funding distributions because no federal or state funding formula is distributed on the basis of redistricting data. This analysis has been confirmed by decades of experience of hundreds of local governments that have excluded prison populations when drawing local districts without any effect on the funding they receive. Moreover, our model bill, and some recent proposed legislation in Illinois (HB62 2013) and Rhode Island (SB516 2013) explicitly say “The data … shall not be used in the distribution of any state or federal aid.”

To recap, the prison miscount has a severe impact on elections, but the impact on funding in rural prison-hosting areas tends to be minor, and the funding impact is nonexistent in urban high-incarceration communities.

News articles often spread the common misconception that there is a direct connection between the prison miscount and the formula grants received, but none of these claims have ever withstood scrutiny.

These stories about an impact which does not exist threaten the longstanding rural-urban coalition for Census reform.

For more information and references, contact Peter Wagner, Executive Director of the Prison Policy Initiative at http://www.prisonpolicy.org/contact.html
On Friday, Dec 23, a federal three-judge panel rejected a lawsuit seeking to overturn Maryland’s landmark “No Representation Without Population Act,” which counts incarcerated people as residents of their legal home addresses for redistricting purposes.

The Maryland law addressed a long-standing problem in the federal Census that counts incarcerated people as residents of the prison location, even though they cannot vote and retain their pre-incarcerated residences. For decades, using unadjusted Census data diluted the vote of every Maryland resident who did not live near the prison complex in western Maryland, and had a particularly negative effect on African-American communities that experience disproportionate rates of incarceration.

The Judges note that the No Representation Without Population Act they upheld was an important Maryland civil rights victory: “As the amicus brief … makes clear, the Act was the product of years of work by groups dedicated to advancing the interests of minorities.” (p. 20)

Other versions of Maryland’s law have since passed in New York, Delaware and California. Maryland was the only state to apply its law to congressional redistricting, and the first state to complete the process after passing a law. The Judges’ ruling that the law was properly passed and fairly implemented will encourage other states to pass similar laws and will hopefully encourage the Census Bureau to make their own changes in where incarcerated people are counted.

The Court issued its ruling late on the Friday before closing for the Christmas weekend, and just three days after a hearing on the evidence and oral arguments on Tuesday. The Court had promised a decision by the end of January, but quickly concluded that the lawsuit was without merit. The case, *Fletcher v. Lamone*, was a Republican-backed lawsuit that challenged the congressional plan proposed by the Democratic governor of Maryland. The suit raised claims of partisan gerrymandering and racial discrimination against African-Americans. Three of the claims attacked the No Representation Without Population Act as part of that otherwise unrelated lawsuit.

The Court explained the law and its rationale:

- Quoting the state’s summary, “the Act is intended to ‘correct for the distortional effects of the Census Bureau’s practice of counting prisoners as residents of their place of incarceration.’” The court then goes on to explain:
  
  “These distortional effects stem from the fact that while the majority of the state’s prisoners come from African-American areas, the state’s prisons are located primarily in the majority white First and Sixth Districts. As a result, residents of districts with prisons are systematically ‘overrepresented’ compared to other districts. In other words, residents of districts with prisons are able to elect the same number of representatives despite in reality having comparatively fewer voting-eligible members of their community.” (p. 9)

- The Court noted the critical importance of ending prison-based gerrymandering in local redistricting where the impact of a single prison can be the majority of a district. The Court discussed the infamous Somerset County example where a county commission district intended to be majority African-American was unable to elect an African-American for decades because the district contained a large prison and the African-American voting population of the district was too small to elect a candidate of African-American voters’ choice. (p. 9)
The Court explained that states are not required to blindly use the Census for redistricting purposes:

- Federal law requires Congressional districts to be exactly equal in population, but does not prohibit states from making improvements to the federal census data in establishing that population base. Federal case law allows adjustments to the data used for congressional districts. Although Census data is presumed to be a good starting point, the data can be adjusted to correct for flaws. These adjustments, however, may not be done in “a haphazard, inconsistent, or conjectural manner.” (pp. 12-13)

- The Court found that The No Representation Without Population Act and its implementation by the Maryland Planning Department meets the standard, writing:
  
  “The question remains whether Maryland’s adjustments to census data were made in the systematic manner demanded by Karcher. It seems clear to us that they were. As required by the regulations implementing the Act, … [the Maryland Department of Planning] undertook and documented a multistep process by which it attempted to identify the last known address of all individuals in Maryland’s prisons…. This process is a far cry from the ‘haphazard, inconsistent, or conjectural’ alterations the Supreme Court rejected in Karcher.” (pp. 16-17)

- Because the No Representation Without Population Act was found to satisfy even the stricter standards applicable to congressional districts, the opinion bodes well for the constitutionality of similar laws that apply to state legislative and local redistricting, where governmental discretion to make adjustments in Census data is even clearer.

The Court addressed several other issues that come up frequently in discussions about ending prison-based gerrymandering:

- Improving how incarcerated people are counted does not necessitate improving how other groups are counted. Plaintiffs criticized the state for reallocating incarcerated people to their homes, but not doing the same for members of the military or students in dorms. The Court called the assumption that these populations are all similarly situated to be “questionable at best.” The court explains:

  “College students and members of the military are eligible to vote, while incarcerated persons are not. In addition, college students and military personnel have the liberty to interact with members of the surrounding community and to engage fully in civic life. In this sense, both groups have a much more substantial connection to, and effect on, the communities where they reside than do prisoners.” (p. 18)

- States should improve redistricting data where possible, even if it cannot be made perfect. For example, plaintiffs criticized the state’s reallocation because not all incarcerated people return to their exact prior address. The Court ruled:

  “Because some correction is better than no correction, the State’s adjusted data will likewise be more accurate than the information contained in the initial census reports, which does not take prisoners’ community ties into account at all.” (pp.18-19)

- The Court found that “although the Census Bureau was not itself willing to undertake the steps required to count prisoners at their home addresses, it has supported efforts by States to do so,” quoting the Census Bureau Director’s explanation that the new Advance Group Quarters data would

  “enable states ‘to leave the prisoners counted where the prisons are, delete them from redistricting formulas, or assign them to some other locale.’” (p. 16)

- The Court also addressed the main impetus for our brief, namely the plaintiff’s bizarre implication that a law passed with the intent of improving African-American voting rights somehow diluted African-American votes:

  “Our review of the record reveals no evidence that intentional racial classifications were the moving force behind the passage of the Act. In fact, the evidence before us points to precisely the opposite conclusion.” (p.19)

UPDATE:

On June 26, 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court summarily affirmed the opinion of this three-judge panel!
Select national organizations that support ending prison gerrymandering

Advancement Project
American Civil Liberties Union
Black Leadership Forum
Brennan Center for Justice
Common Cause
CURE International
Dēmos
Drug Policy Alliance
Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN)
FairVote
Grassroots Leadership
Human Rights Defense Center
Justice Policy Institute
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of Women Voters of the United States
MALDEF
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense Fund
NAACP National Voter Fund
National Urban League
Nonprofit VOTE
Prison Policy Initiative
Southern Center for Human Rights
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Sentencing Project
U.S. Conference of Mayors
Prison-Based Gerrymandering

The Census Bureau has steadfastly resisted calls to end the practice of counting inmates as “residents” of their prisons instead of the cities and towns where they lived and to which they typically return. The bureau’s new director, John Thompson, seems at least open to ending this wrongful practice.

Counting inmates at their correctional institutions encourages prison-based gerrymandering, by which state lawmakers draw legislative districts that consist partly or even mainly of prison populations, even though inmates are denied the right to vote in all but two states. This enhances the political power of the mainly rural districts where prisons are built and undercut the influence of the urban districts where many inmates came from.

Four states and about 200 municipalities have acted against prison gerrymandering in recent years because the prison count had warped the political landscape. Maryland, for example, required inmates to be counted in their home communities after learning that inmates were nearly a fifth of the “residents” in one legislative district and 64 percent of the population of one county commission district. But state and local laws that require inmates to be counted in their hometowns often require piecemeal adjustments to the census data. That’s why members of Congress are pushing the Census Bureau to solve this problem.

Earlier this spring, for example, 18 House Democrats signed a letter asking the bureau develop “a standardized national solution to the problem of redistricting distortion” that would make it easier to draw honest legislative districts. At a Congressional hearing earlier this month, Mr. Thompson said that the Census Bureau had not yet decided on the rules for the 2020 census and would do so after consultations with interested parties.

They should reform the current system. It distorts the political process and raises concerns about the fairness of the census process itself. That’s reason enough for the bureau to solve this problem now.
Why we’re about to end prison gerrymandering in Colo.

By Kerry Tipper and James Coleman
Guest Commentary

Our bill to end prison gerrymandering in Colorado is just one step from becoming law. This month, the House voted to pass HB 1010, and now the Senate has done the same. If it is signed by the governor, as we expect it to be, this bill will ensure that our state has fair electoral maps, a stronger democracy and a more just political representation.

Prison gerrymandering is the practice of counting incarcerated individuals as residents of the prison cells they have been placed in. There are several important problems here. First, the Colorado Constitution plainly declares that a prison cell is not a residence, meaning that people in prison are not legal constituents of the area where they have been incarcerated. And they’re definitely not treated as such.

While digging into this issue and drafting this bill, we spoke to several elected officials who represented large populations of incarcerated people and asked whether they had ever held a town hall in a correctional facility. No one knew how many inmates were in their district, and only one had ever met with incarcerated individuals in their district.

So how can we improve this system? Our bill would ensure that inmates are, for purposes of state redistricting, counted as residents of their last known address during the census. The result would be that a prisoner’s political representation will be tied to the community they are rooted in and not the temporary prison cell where they are serving time. Because the average prisoner in Colorado is incarcerated for three years and the census happens every 10, this is especially important.

This bill is about fairness, plain and simple. With the 2020 census coming to Colorado in the next month or so, we want to ensure that Colorado has accurate and fair representation in the next decade and beyond. While we certainly set out to do right by the 19,000 or so incarcerated individuals in Colorado, our bill is about much more than just them. More accurate district maps, a fairer count of Coloradans and better population data means a stronger democracy.

This bill will make a difference for everyone who wants to ensure their districts have the most accurate representation possible.

As informed readers will know, census counts are about more than just redistricting and political representation — the distribution of federal funds are tied to census counts. Rest assured, this bill will not affect how state or federal funding is allocated. It may alter the shape of some legislative districts, but this won’t impact funding for any district’s infrastructure, public safety or other services.

This is because no funding agency, in any state, ever relies on redistricting data to determine grant amounts. Furthermore, the bill will have a zero-dollar fiscal impact. The Department of Corrections already has the data required by the bill, and the Census Bureau will even aid in correcting the redistricting data.

As we begin this census year and as a nation undertake the massive enterprise of counting each person living here, it is imperative that we do it in the most accurate and just way possible. What’s more, Coloradans have already agreed that we want fair district maps — that’s why in 2018, more than 60% of voters supported bipartisan Amendments Y and Z, which created two new independent redistricting commissions.

We’re proud that our House and Senate colleagues joined us in passing HB 1010, and we’re excited to see Gov. Jared Polis sign it into law. Our state’s democracy will be better for it.

Kerry Tipper is the state representative for House District 28, where she represents Lakewood and a small part of Littleton. She sits on the House Judiciary Committee and the House Health and Insurance Committee. James Coleman is the representative for House District 7 in Denver. He is the co-whip of the Democratic Caucus and sits on the House Appropriations, Education, and Business Affairs and Labor Committees.
Beginning of the end for ‘prison-based gerrymandering’

Sandwiched between its controversial immigration, campaign finance and health-care rulings last month, the Supreme Court issued a little-noticed decision in a Maryland case that gave the green light to states to eliminate the repugnant practice of “prison-based gerrymandering.”

States are now unquestionably free to correct for an ancient flaw in the U.S. Census that counts incarcerated people as residents not of their homes but of the places where their prisons are located. When the prison population was small, the problem was little more than statistical trivia. Today, however, the census counts more than 2 million people as though they were residents of places where they have no community ties.

In a June 25 summary disposition of the case Fletcher v. Lamone, the court upheld Maryland’s landmark 2010 “No Representation Without Population Act,” which does what the Census Bureau would not: count incarcerated people at home for redistricting purposes. Maryland was the first state to recognize that the bureau’s method of counting people in prison resulted in a systematic transfer of political clout that undermined the constitutional principle of “one person, one vote.”

As a 2010 report I presented to the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland showed, after the 2000 Census Maryland drew one state legislative district that was 16 percent incarcerated. The result was to give every four people who lived near the cluster of prisons in Hagerstown the same representation in Annapolis as five from any other district in the state. While urban and African American communities bore the brunt of the harm, prison-based gerrymandering diluted the votes of residents of communities across the state.

Each level of government experiences this problem differently. Local governments often provide the most dramatic examples. Somerset County, on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, has a sizable African American voting population, but until 2010 it had never elected an African American to county office. In the 1980s, the county settled a Voting Rights Act lawsuit by agreeing to create a district in which African Americans had the numbers to elect a candidate of their choice, but census counts that included the prisons created problems. Padding one district with a largely African American and entirely nonvoting prison population created what we call a “false majority-minority district,” which did not contain enough African American voters to carry an election. Prison-based gerrymandering split the African American voting population between multiple districts, and for decades the county commission remained entirely white.

Maryland’s law now requires the state to determine the home addresses of incarcerated people and perform a simple adjustment to the federal census data prior to redistricting. Lead sponsors Sen. Catherine Pugh (D-Baltimore) and Del. Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk (D-Prince George’s) had large prisons in their districts, took a principled stand for fair redistricting and won bipartisan, urban and rural support for their bill. They made it clear that their bill would not affect funding but would ensure equal representation for all.

Three other states quickly followed suit. New York’s version was successfully implemented for this decade’s redistricting, and Delaware and California’s laws require incarcerated people to be counted at home for the redistricting cycle in 2020. Several other states, from Rhode Island and New Jersey to Illinois to Oregon, are considering similar legislation. Of course, the best place to improve on federal Census Bureau data is at the bureau itself. The Supreme Court’s ruling will accelerate states’ demand for the tools and data needed to end prison-based gerrymandering. Thankfully, census policy is not set in stone. As the country has changed, the rules for counting many groups has necessarily evolved as well. As former Census Bureau director Kenneth Prewitt has explained: “Current census residency rules ignore the reality of prison life… Counting people in prison as residents of their home communities offers a more accurate picture of the size, demographics and needs of our nation’s communities.”

The next census is years away, but the planning for it is already underway. The bureau should figure out how to count incarcerated people at home in the next census, or all states should follow Maryland’s lead and, with the blessing of the Supreme Court, improve the census themselves.

The writer is executive director of the Prison Policy Initiative.
Prisoners lack vote, yet they shape vote

Inmates clustered in rural Texas profoundly if subtly affect politics.

By Jonathan Tilove
jtilove@statesman.com

According to the 2010 census, 2,097 of the 36,273 inhabitants of Hale County are in prison. That’s no reflection on Hale or its county seat — the little city of Plainview, located just north of Lubbock. It’s just an artifact of what might be the most common publicly funded enterprise dotting the rural Texas landscape — a correctional institution, or in the case of Hale, two side-by-side state jails, the Wheeler and Formby units, the former named for a local banker and the latter for a radio pioneer who served a term in the Texas Senate.

Playing host to those doing time for crimes mostly committed in the state’s big cities provides places like Hale County a welcome economic lift. But when it comes time to draw lines for the four precincts that each elect a coun-

Prisoners continued on A8
There are 40 Texas counties, and a few cities, with proportionally larger — sometimes far larger — prison populations than Harris County. Here is a list of counties in which prisoners constitute more than 20 percent of the population:

- Concho County
- Galveston County
- Midland County
- Jones County
- Lee County
- Bee County
- Anderson County
- Reeves County
- Harbert County
- Harris County

**COUNTIES WITH BIGGEST PROPORTION OF PRISONERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Incarcerated Population</th>
<th>Percent Incarcerated</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concho County</td>
<td>4,087</td>
<td>1,556</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galveston</td>
<td>6,461</td>
<td>1,951</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midland</td>
<td>5,403</td>
<td>2,926</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones County</td>
<td>20,202</td>
<td>4,021</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee County</td>
<td>6,886</td>
<td>1,583</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bee County</td>
<td>31,861</td>
<td>7,196</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>58,458</td>
<td>13,163</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reeves</td>
<td>13,783</td>
<td>3,034</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbert</td>
<td>6,062</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris County</td>
<td>6,824</td>
<td>3,159</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Prison Policy Initiative

*It didn’t seem fair to me to conclude that population in any precinct because their residence was not established voluntarily, and, since they are convicted of crime, they don’t have the right to vote.*

Bill Coleman, Harris County judge

**EXPERT REPORTING**

Jonathan Tivoli, the American Civil Liberties Union’s chief political writer, has written extensively on demographics and political power.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

- The 2010 round of redistricting based on their legal home addresses.
- Two other states — Delaware and California — have passed laws imposing that requirement for the 2020 round. The Supreme Court last year upheld the constitutionality of the Maryland law.

**FURTHER READING:**
- The Texas Tribune for more on the redistricting process.
- The Houston Chronicle for coverage of the Supreme Court decision.

*Most do absolutely zex,* he said. In Harris County, Coleman also dismisses the idea that county commissioners consider inmates at Wheeler or Formby as anything like true constituents.

*They’re not going to be calling you on the phone or showing up at constituents’ meetings,* Coleman said. *If they do, then you have set their priorities wrong.*

Contact: Jonathan Tivoli at 512-445-3572.
Time to end prison gerrymandering in Connecticut

By SCOT X. ESDAILE
SPECIAL TO HARTFORD COURANT | MAR 06, 2020

Connecticut proudly calls itself the Constitution State. But the state’s stubborn reliance on “prison gerrymandering” unfairly robs urban communities of political power and denies voters — especially black and brown voters — the constitutional guarantee of “one person, one vote.”

Connecticut draws its state legislative districts using “prison gerrymandering,” counting incarcerated people as residents of the districts where they are incarcerated, rather than in their home districts. It means an area such as north central Connecticut, where many
prisons are located, would have an extra House district or two compared to if those incarcerated people were counted in Hartford, which would then have those districts and their representatives.

As a result, residents of Connecticut’s predominantly white, rural districts — where most of the state’s prisons are concentrated — have greater representation in the Connecticut legislature than black and brown residents of urban districts.

To take one troubling example, a New Haven resident’s vote for state offices in the 2020 election will count for only 85% of the vote of a resident in Enfield or Somers. Why? Because for every 85 residents of House District 59 (Enfield), there are over 100 in House District 97 (New Haven).

To ignore the civil rights implications of prison gerrymandering is morally wrong.

Connecticut has the fifth highest rate of incarcerated black men in the country. Despite comprising only about a quarter of the state’s overall population, African Americans and Latinos in Connecticut prisons outnumber incarcerated whites 2-to-1. Yet by counting black and Latino inmates as though they are residents of rural districts, the system operates under a deceitful fiction that elected officials from these almost all-white districts will adequately represent them.

In reality, the vast majority of incarcerated people have no meaningful connection with the towns in which they are held. They do not use the roads, parks or public services in these towns. They do not send their children to local schools. And they don’t vote in these areas. Representatives of these districts do not even act like they care about the needs and interests of the incarcerated population, neglecting a sizable portion of their so-called constituency.

Because virtually all incarcerated people are barred from voting, they exist purely as “invisible residents,” able to be counted but denied a voice.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time the bodies of people of color in America have been used to inflate white political power. From the earliest days of the republic, the Three-Fifths Clause of the Constitution allowed for the partial counting of slaves in determining a state’s delegation in the House of Representatives while denying the
What we lose when learning goes online

franchise to all blacks, free and enslaved. While we have progressed from that painful chapter of America’s history, the question still remains: Has our country learned from our wicked past? Prison gerrymandering exploits black and brown bodies to amplify white voices. That practice was wrong 200 years ago, and it is wrong today.

The unjustness and absurdity of prison gerrymandering is clear, which is why Connecticut law already mandates that the few incarcerated people who retain the right to vote must do so in their pre-incarceration districts, not in the prison towns where the Department of Correction happens to hold them.

As we race toward another round of redistricting following the 2020 census, we need to ensure that every vote in Connecticut counts equally. Senate Bill 368 would prohibit the practice of prison gerrymandering in all future redistricting efforts, ensuring that the state meets its obligation to apportion representation fairly across Connecticut. If passed, the bill would place Connecticut among seven other states that have enacted laws banning prison gerrymandering and advancing democratic integrity. Legislative maps adopted after the next round of redistricting in 2021 would justly reflect the actual populations in various parts of the state.

Opponents to ending prison gerrymandering contend that their concerns are purely fiscal. These arguments ring hollow and call to mind the fiscal arguments of those who opposed the end of slavery in America. Then, and now, such assertions are a red herring meant to scare the state out of doing what is right. The federal government only uses census figures to apportion funding among the 50 states; that funding is not tied to any particular region.

To further ease concerns, the bill under consideration explicitly limits the population realignment resulting from the end of prison gerrymandering to purposes related to legislative apportionment. The new population data cannot be used to recalculate state funding to municipalities and will not affect current or future revenue streams.

Make no mistake about it: The fight about prison gerrymandering is not about money. It’s about white, rural districts holding onto power by using
Why early releases from prison will help fight the coronavirus crisis

Denise Merrill: It's time to allow voting by mail

black and brown bodies to inflate their numbers.

The denial of equal political representation to residents of Connecticut’s urban centers is insult and injury to essential democratic values. For as long as Connecticut continues to use prison gerrymandering in its apportionment of political representation, it will treat urban voters as second class citizens.

The righteous path forward is the one that ends prison gerrymandering and counts every person equally.

*Scot X. Esdaile is the president of the NAACP-Connecticut Conference.*
Example Bill: Ending prison-based gerrymandering in your state.

This model legislation requires the state prison system to collect home residence data and the Secretary of State to merge that data with the federal census prior to redistricting. This legislation was prepared by a coalition of civil rights, voting rights, and criminal justice organizations based on the lessons of the states that have already successfully passed and implemented legislation ending prison gerrymandering. The comments offer guidance on adapting the model bill to the specifics of your state. If the Prison Policy Initiative’s experience on this issue would be of assistance, don’t hesitate to reach out.

—Aleks Kajstura
last updated Jan. 8, 2020
Purpose of Legislation

This bill provides for adjusting population data used in redistricting to conform to the [Oregon] Constitution. The Census Bureau allocates incarcerated persons as if they were residents of their places of incarceration rather than of their home addresses. Article IV of Section 4, however, states that for “the purpose of voting, no person shall be deemed to have gained, or lost a residence... while confined in any public prison.”

Bill

Section 1. The legislature notes that section 4 of article IV of the [Oregon] constitution provides in pertinent part as follows: “For the purpose of voting, no person shall be deemed to have gained, or lost a residence... while confined in any public prison.” Investigation has shown that, despite these provisions, the Census classifies incarcerated persons as residents of their places of incarceration rather than of their home addresses. The provisions of this act are necessary to provide procedures and duties to correct this discrepancy.

Section 2. The election law is amended by adding a new section 188.020 to read as follows:

1. Electronic record. The Department of Corrections shall, starting within 6 months of the effective date of this statute, collect and maintain an electronic record of the legal residence, presumptively outside of the facility, and other demographic data, for any person entering its custody. At a minimum, this record shall contain the last known complete street address prior to incarceration, the person's race, whether the person is of Hispanic or Latino origin, and whether the person is over the age of 18. To the degree possible, the Department of Corrections shall also allow the legal residence to be updated as appropriate.

2. Reports to the Secretary of State.
(a) In each year in which the federal decennial census is taken but in which the United States Bureau of the Census allocates incarcerated persons as residents of correctional facilities, the Department of Corrections shall by May 1st of that same year deliver to the Secretary of State:

(i) a unique identifier, not including the name, or SID (state offender ID) number, for each incarcerated person subject to the jurisdiction of the department on the date for which the decennial census reports population. The unique identifier shall enable the Secretary of State to address inquiries about specific address records to the Department of Corrections, without making it possible for anyone outside of the Department of Corrections to identify the inmate to whom the address record pertains;

(ii) the street address of the correctional facility in which such person was incarcerated at the time of such report;

(iii) the last known address of such person prior to incarceration or other legal residence (if known);

(iv) the person’s race, whether the person is of Hispanic or Latino origin, and whether the person is over the age of 18 (if known);

(v) any additional information as the Secretary of State may request pursuant to law.

(b) The department shall provide the information specified in paragraph (a) of this

This section requires the Department of Corrections to provide the Secretary of State with the residence, race, ethnicity, and age information for each person in custody at Census time. The section also contains a sunset provision that terminates the reporting and data adjustment when the Census Bureau counts incarcerated people at home.

This section is a privacy provision that prevents public disclosure of individual address information. Note that other states have their own unique equivalents to the Oregon SID numbers.
subdivision in such form as the Secretary of State shall specify.

(c) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the information required to be provided to the Secretary of State pursuant to this subdivision shall not include the name of any incarcerated person and shall not allow for the identification of any such person therefrom, except to the Department of Corrections. The information shall be treated as confidential, and shall not be disclosed by the Secretary of State except as redistricting data aggregated by census block for purposes specified in Section 4.

3. Federal facilities. The Secretary of State shall request each agency that operates a federal facility in this State that incarcerates persons convicted of a criminal offense to provide the Secretary of State with a report including the information listed in subsection (a) of Section 2.

4. The Secretary of State shall prepare redistricting population data to reflect incarcerated persons at their residential address, pursuant to Section 5. The data prepared by the Secretary of State pursuant to Section 5 shall be the basis of state house of representative districts, state senate districts, and all local government districts that are based on population. Incarcerated populations residing at unknown geographic locations within the State, as determined under subsection (c)(ii) of Section 5 shall not be used to determine the ideal population of any set of districts, wards, or precincts.

5. Determinations and data publication by the Secretary of State.

(a) For each person included in a report received under Sections 2 and 3, the Secretary of State shall determine the geographic units for which population counts are reported in the federal decennial census that contain the facility of incarceration and the legal residence as listed according to the report.
(b) For each person included in a report received under Sections 2 and 3, if the legal residence is known and in this State, the Secretary of State shall:

(i) Ensure that the person is not represented in any population counts reported by the Secretary of State for the geographic units that include the facility at which the person was incarcerated, unless that geographic unit also includes the person's legal residence.

(ii) Ensure that any population counts reported by the Secretary of State reflect the persons' residential address as reported under Sections 2 and 3.

(c) For each person included in a report received under Sections 2 and 3 for whom a legal residence is unknown or not in this State, and for all persons reported in the census as residing in a federal correctional facility for whom a report was not provided, the Secretary of State shall:

(i) Ensure that the person is not represented in any population counts reported by the Secretary of State for the geographic units that include the facility at which the person was incarcerated.

(ii) Allocate the person to a state unit not tied to a specific determined geography, as other state residents with unknown state addresses are allocated, including but not limited to military and federal government personnel stationed overseas.

(d) The data prepared by the Secretary of State pursuant to this section shall be completed and published no later than 30 days from the date that federal decennial PL94-171 data is published for the State.

This section directs the Secretary of State on how to process missing or incomplete data.

The Census Bureau's redistricting data will become available between January and March 2021, but the Secretary of State will receive the report from the prison systems about a year earlier, by May 2020. Depending on state and local redistricting deadlines, some states may be able to give the Secretary of
(e) The Secretary of State shall notify local governments that Section 4 requires local governments to use the data prepared by the Secretary pursuant to this Section for redistricting purposes.

6. The data prepared by the Secretary of State in Section 5 shall not be used in the distribution of any state or federal aid.

7. If any provision of this Act or the application of any provision of this Act to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of the Act that can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and for this purpose the provisions of this Act are severable.
Resolutions

Organizations and legislative bodies can make their views on the Census Bureau’s prison count and the practice of prison-based gerrymandering known through formal resolutions and recommendations. On this page, we provide some sample resolutions and links to adopted resolutions.

Samples

- Resolution prepared for Massachusetts calling on the Census Bureau to change where it counts people in prison
- Resolution prepared for an urban county in California calling on the state to eliminate prison-based gerrymandering
- Resolution prepared for Jackson Mississippi calling on the state to eliminate prison-based gerrymandering
- Although technically not a resolution, Essex County Local Law Number 1 of 2003 offers a detailed declaration of why a rural county would not want to consider prison populations a part of their community or their electoral system.

Adopted resolutions

- Counting Prisoners, City Club of Portland redistricting study committee, February, 2012.

  Our committee concluded that including prison populations in the district where the prison is located distorts the one-man, one-vote principle, giving communities with prison populations more influence than their population of permanent residents would justify.

  Our committee recommends that the Legislature reconsider Senate Bill 720 and
pass it in the next session. Passage of such a bill would create greater clarity on how prisoners should be counted, thus removing a potential source of discord from the redistricting process. It would also correct the situation in which certain districts have unwarranted advantage in political representation because of large prison populations.


  “The Committee recommends that the Census Bureau prioritize conducting research as part of their 2020 Census planning to describe a process and the feasibility of implementing changes to the "usual residence" rule to provide a count in the 2020 Census of incarcerated persons at the pre-incarceration addresses, including identifying the best means of gathering such information and incorporating it into Census counts nationwide.


- Reform of prison-based census counting, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, December 2010:

  “… THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) believes that the Census Bureau should count incarcerated individuals at their addresses of residence, rather than the address of the prison during the 2020 and all future decennial Censuses;

  “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that until the Census Bureau counts incarcerated
individuals at their actual residential addresses, the NBCSL encourages states to enact legislation modeled after the Delaware, Maryland, and New York laws….”


  “The Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC) recommends that the Census Bureau conduct research as part of their 2020 Census planning to describe a process and the feasibility of implementing changes to the ‘usual residence’ rule to provide a count in the 2020 Census of incarcerated persons at the pre-incarceration addresses, including identifying the best means of gathering such information and incorporating it into Census counts nationwide….”

• **End Prison-Based Gerrymandering NAACP, 101st Convention**, July 13, 2010:

  “THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the NAACP reaffirms the 2009 resolution on ending prison-based gerrymandering; and

  “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the NAACP will continue to advocate to the United States Congress, the United States Department of Commerce and to the public that the Census count incarcerated people as residents of their last home address; and […]

  “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NAACP concludes that until the Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of their homes, the fundamental principle of one person one vote" would be best satisfied if redistricting committees
refused to use prison counts to mask population shortfalls in districts that contain prisons; and

“BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NAACP advocate that the prison population census count not be used in any legislative district at the local, state and federal level.”

- Support of Illinois House Bill 4650, creating Prisoner Census Adjustment Act Chicago City Council, May 12, 2010


  “The AA REAC recommends the Census Bureau allows prison inmates to fill out individual census forms giving their own preference as to place of residence, rather than continuing the current practice of having the prisoners counted as group quarter’s population where they are incarcerated.

  The AA REAC recommends the Census Bureau provides an opportunity to discuss the topic of prisoners… and political representation in the communities from which they came.”

- Resolution calling on the New York State Legislature to amend the Election Law so that prisoners are counted as residents of the county in which they reside prior to incarceration, rather than as residents of the county in which they are detained, 0190-2006, New York City Council, December 21, 2009

- Resolution calling upon the United States Census Bureau to enforce a decennial census enumeration policy in which incarcerated juveniles and adults are counted in the keeping
with the “one person, one vote” principle inherent in the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, to insure that on the New York State Legislature to amend the Election Law so that prisoners are counted as residents of the county in which they reside prior to incarceration, rather than as residents of the county in which they are detained, 2261-2009, **New York City Council**, December 21, 2009

• **Resolution, NAACP, 100th Convention, July 14, 2009:**

  “… THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the NAACP, on principle, decries the enumeration of prisoners as local residents as violation of our nation’s fundamental one person one vote ethos of representational democracy, harkening back to the disgraceful three fifths era of constitutionally sanctioned slavery; and

  “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NAACP calls on the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census to enumerate prisoners within census blocks where domiciled at their time of arrest; and

  “BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that NAACP units call upon their Congressional representatives to effect such a permanent change to the Census Bureau enumeration procedures.”

• **Resolution, NAACP, 99th Convention, July, 2008:**

  “… BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NAACP will advocate that the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, that for the purposes of the 2010 census, that all prisoners he enumerated as residents of the census tract wherein they were domiciled at the time of their arrest and/or conviction.”
• **Recommendation 7.2** National Research Council of the National Academies, *Once, Only Once, and in the Right Place: Residence Rules in the Decennial Census*, 2006, p. 243:

  “A research and testing program, including experimentation as part of the 2010 census, should be initiated by the Census Bureau to evaluate the feasibility and cost of assigning incarcerated and institutionalized individuals, who have another address, to the other location.”

• **Recommendation 10**, Census Advisory Committee of the African-American population, October 1-3, 2003:

  “We recommend that prisoners, including those housed outside their states, be counted as residents of their pre-incarceration addresses…”
End "Prison-Based Gerrymandering"

Ratified by the NAACP at the 101st Convention, on July 13, 2010. We scanned in the text of the resolution, below, from a deligate packet distributed at the convention. The resolution was submitted by Crossroads Correctional Center (MO) Branch and San Jose/Silicon Valley (CA) Branch.

WHEREAS, the U.S. Census Bureau counts people in prison as residents of the community that contains the prison, not the community that they are legal residents of; and

WHEREAS, census data is the basis for legislative districts, counting incarcerated people as residents of the prison community enhances the weight of a vote cast in a district with a prison while diluting the weight of votes in all other districts; and

WHEREAS, this practice, which has come to be known as "prison-based gerrymandering", violates the United States Supreme Court's rule of "one person one vote" which requires that each person have the same access to government regardless of where they live; and

WHEREAS, African Americans are incarcerated at a rate 6 times higher than whites; and

WHEREAS, the majority of state and federal prisons are built in disproportionately white rural areas; and [...] 

WHEREAS, counting incarcerated people as residents of the prison community has particularly negative effect on the voting strength of African American communities; and

WHEREAS, in 2003, the African American subcommittee of the Census Bureau's Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee recommended that the Census Bureau count prisoners as residents of their pre-incarceration addresses; and

WHEREAS, in 2006, the Census Bureau's own advisors at the National Research Council called on the Bureau to begin collecting the home addresses of incarcerated people and to study the best way to use those addresses; and
WHEREAS in 2008, the NAACP convention in Cincinnati called on the Census Bureau to count incarcerated people as residents of their home addresses; and

WHEREAS, in 2009, Hilary O. Shelton, Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau, told the Washington Post that, "where incarcerated people are counted in the Census is a long-standing concern of the NAACP"; and

WHEREAS, in 2009, the NAACP Convention in New York reaffirmed its earlier resolution calling for the Census Bureau to change where prisoners were counted and decried the "enumeration of prisoners as local residents as violation of our nations' fundamental 'one person one vote' ethos of representational democracy, harkening back to the disgraceful three-fifths era of constitutionally sanctioned slavery"; and

WHEREAS, in December 2009, a dozen African American leaders including representatives of the NAACP, Legal Defense Fund, National Urban League, Rainbow/Push Coalition, and the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation met with Commerce Department Secretary Gary Locke to ask for a change in how incarcerated people are counted in the Census; and

WHEREAS, the United States Census Bureau ignored all of these recommendations, and in April 2010, again counted more than 2 million incarcerated citizens as residents of the prison wherein they were imprisoned; and

WHEREAS, Congressman William Lacy Clay (D) of Missouri, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census and National Archives, recognized that the Bureau had squandered the planning time necessary to change where prisoners are counted, negotiated a groundbreaking agreement to change how census counts of prisoners are reported to state and local governments; and

WHEREAS, the Census Bureau has agreed, for the first time, to release data on prison populations to states in time for redistricting; and

WHEREAS, Congressman Clay and voting rights advocates have urged states and local governments to take advantage of this more
timely data to cease the practice of inflating the representation awarded to districts that contain prisons; and

WHEREAS Peter Wagner, Executive Director of the Prison Policy initiative, said in congressional testimony that a national change in where incarcerated people are counted in the Census must wait until 2011 when planning begins for the next Census, but that eliminating prison-based gerrymandering; and

WHEREAS, the impact of prison-based gerrymandering would be greatly reduced if state and county legislatures refused to credit prison districts with the incarcerated population.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the NAACP reaffirms the 2009 resolution on ending prison-based gerrymandering; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the NAACP will continue to advocate to the United States Congress, the United States Department of Commerce and to the public that the Census count incarcerated people as residents of their last home address; and […]

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NAACP concludes that until the Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of their homes, the fundamental principle of one person one vote" would be best satisfied if redistricting committees refused to use prison counts to mask population shortfalls in districts that contain prisons; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NAACP advocate that the prison population census count not be used in any legislative district at the local, state and federal level.