Local governments continue to address prison gerrymandering in their own local
government redistricting data, often without state support

Population equality among legislative districts enables
everyone to have equal representation from elected officials.
Prison gerrymandering is a problem created because the
Census Bureau incorrectly counts incarcerated people as
residents of their prison cells rather than their home
communities. As a result, when municipalities or counties use
Census data to draw new local government districts, they
inadvertently give residents of districts with prisons greater
political clout than all other residents in the community.

Outsize impact on local governments.
Because of their smaller populations, the Census Bureau’s
policy of counting incarcerated people at the location has a
greater impact in skewing local democracy. Putting prisons
in rural areas means that a single prison can have an outsize
impact on the local population counts. When drawing
districts, rural communities a single prison can easily
account for a full county commissioner district population.

Rural governments at the forefront of reform
efforts.
In addition to the 200+ local governments that avoided
prison gerrymandering after the 2000 and 2010 Censuses
we identified an additional 21 local governments scattered
across 10 states that started doing so after the 2020 Census:

- Arkansas: Izard and Jackson Counties
- Delaware: City of Willmington
- Florida: Columbia and Jefferson Counties
- Georgia: Coffee, Emanuel, Long, Monroe,
  Montgomery, and Wayne Counties
- Louisiana: Allen and Catahoula Parishes
- Oklahoma: Atoka and Woodward Counties
- Rhode Island: City of Central Falls
- North Carolina: Granville County
- South Carolina: Williamsburg County
- Tennessee: Hardeman, Johnson, and Morgan Counties

Rural communities are at risk of being left
behind in wave of reforms.
Rural communities – where most prisons are located – were
at the forefront of adjusting redistricting populations to
avoid prison gerrymandering. But as states have started
taking on reform and reallocating people to count them at
home in redistricting data, rural areas of the country are
now at risk of being left behind.

Not only do rural communities bear the biggest impact of
prison gerrymandering, but increasingly all residents of
rural states are left behind in state efforts to end prison
gerrymandering. Our analysis of the ten worst prison
gerrymanders in the nation show the problem is
increasingly harming residents of rural states and defying
some of the preconceived notions about partisan impacts –
of these ten districts, six are districts controlled by
Democrats, while Republicans control four.

Census needs to fix the problem it created.
Roughly half of all U.S. residents now live in a city, county,
or state that has ended prison gerrymandering. Even as
more local governments and states address prison
gerrymandering they can only partially solve the problem.
Prison gerrymandering is a national problem that crosses
jurisdictional boundaries. No city, county, or state can
completely fix this issue on its own. Only the Census
Bureau can fully solve this problem nationwide.