



For more information about Prison-Based Gerrymandering, see our website and weekly newsletter at <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org>

## Prison-Based Gerrymandering in St. Lawrence County

The Supreme Court requires counties to update their legislative districts once per decade so that each district contains the same population, giving each resident equal representation in county government. The US Census Bureau counts people where they are incarcerated, not where they are from, and when the Census figures do not reflect the county's population, democracy suffers.

### The problem

- The Census Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of the prison, but the New York State Constitution says that incarceration does not change a person's residence.
- St. Lawrence County legislature uses 3,120 state prisoners to pad the populations of legislative districts in Ogdensburg and Gouverneur.
- District 2 (Ogdensburg) derives 25% of its population from its prisons; effectively giving each group of 75 people in District 2 as much of a say over county matters as 100 people elsewhere.
- District 5 (Gouverneur) derives 14% of its population from its prison; effectively giving each group of 86 people in District 5 as much political clout as 100 people elsewhere.
- Previously, the county ignored the prison population when redistricting, but changed practices in 2002 for partisan reasons.

### What other counties do

- Thirteen New York counties with large prisons exclude the prison population when apportioning local government.
- In 2004, the then Chairman of the Franklin County Board of Legislators told North Country Public Radio that ignoring the prison population when drawing districts was a "no brainer."

### Solutions for St. Lawrence

- St. Lawrence County should return to its previous practice of excluding the prison population when redrawing districts in 2012.
- Residents of St. Lawrence County should support the passage of bills S6725A and A9834A, pending in the state legislature, to require the Board of Elections to distribute adjusted counts for county use in redistricting.

### Essex County Solution

In 2003, Essex County not only ignored the prison population when apportioning the Board of Supervisors, it enacted a local reapportionment law with the following explanation:

"Persons incarcerated in state and federal correctional institutions live in a separate environment, do not participate in the life of Essex County and do not affect the social and economic character of the towns.... The inclusion of these federal and state correctional facility inmates unfairly dilutes the votes or voting weight of persons residing in other towns within Essex County...."