



# NC COUNTS COALITION

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Census Bureau [Docket Number 220526–0123]

Soliciting Input or Suggestions on 2030 Census Preliminary Research

Subject: Topic A: Reaching and motivating everyone

The undersigned North Carolina-based community organizations respectfully submit these comments to urge the US Census Bureau to count incarcerated people at their last known residence before incarceration. Such a shift would be consistent with how the Bureau counts similarly situated groups, including truck drivers, boarding school students, Congressional members, and military personnel, at home. The same should be true for incarcerated people.

Furthermore, this change will stop the harmful impact of prison gerrymandering in voting maps, where the Bureau's practice of counting incarcerated individuals at their correctional facilities distorts political representation at the local and state level in favor of voters who live near these correctional facilities. Without this change, the Census will continue to force local and state governments to either fail to remediate distortions in their voting maps or, where they hope to address this issue, undertake often only partially-corrective steps to modify Census data before redistricting to ensure representative voting maps. It is time for the Census Bureau to finally count incarcerated people at home in the 2030 Census.

Finally, Counting incarcerated people in their home communities will further help address several of the challenges that the Bureau is anticipating in the 2030 Census, including the following:

- **Distrust in government:** Many communities of color see a [direct link](#) between the history of slavery, Jim Crow, state-sanctioned racial violence, and the inequities of mass incarceration today, which forms the basis of distrust of government at all levels. By continuing the practice of counting incarcerated people at the site of their incarceration and not in their home communities, the Census Bureau is feeding into this history rather than making appropriate changes toward a more equitable future that fosters trust and collaboration between government and communities.
- **Increasingly diverse population:** Many of the communities that see persistent undercounts in the decennial census, including Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Native American communities, are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. Black people make up 38% of the incarcerated population, but only 13% of the general United States population; Latino people make up 21% of the incarcerated population, but only 18% of the general United States population; and



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Native American people make up 2% of the incarcerated population, but only 0.9% of the general United States population<sup>1</sup>. Mass incarceration leads to the geographic transfer of significant populations of people of color out of urban communities and into disproportionately white, rural areas where prisons are located. This misguided approach to counting incarcerated people reduces the political representation of racial minority groups. By continuing the practice of counting incarcerated people at the site of their incarceration and not in their home communities, the Census Bureau is failing to ensure accurate data and representation for community members that have been persistently undercounted.

### Focus on North Carolina:

The impact of the Census Bureau's continued practice of counting incarcerated people at the site of their incarceration has a strong impact on our local communities. North Carolina has an incarceration rate of [617 per 100,000 people](#) (including prisons, jails, immigration detention, and juvenile justice facilities), meaning that it locks up a higher percentage of its people than almost any democracy on earth. In addition to the sheer number of North Carolinians who are impacted by mass incarceration, counting incarcerated people in their home communities will help on a local level to address several of the challenges that the Bureau is anticipating in the 2030 Census, including the following:

- **Distrust in government:** North Carolina has its own history of slavery, Jim Crow, state-sanctioned racial violence, and the inequities of mass incarceration today, as documented by the [GrowingChange History Project \(GCHP\)](#). North Carolina also has a long history of racial gerrymandering and disenfranchisement of Black voters, as documented by this [Brief History of Voter Suppression in North Carolina](#). The history of our state and current inequities faced by communities of color form the basis of distrust of government at all levels. The Census Bureau has an opportunity to address this history and change its practices toward incarcerated community members in order to foster trust and collaboration between government and North Carolina communities.
- **Increasingly diverse population:** In North Carolina, two communities that see persistent undercounts in the decennial census, including Black/African-American and American Indian/Native American communities, are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. Black people make up 55% of the incarcerated population, but only 22% of the general North Carolina population and Native American people make up 2% of the incarcerated population, but only 1% of the general North Carolina population<sup>2</sup>. Within North Carolina, some of the communities that are persistently undercounted have also been growing rapidly. Between the 2010 and 2020 Census, the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2022.html#slideshows/slideshow6/2>: Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Tables B02001 and DP05. For category definition and selection details, see <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2022.html#methodology>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/disparities2010/NC\\_racial\\_disparities\\_2010.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/disparities2010/NC_racial_disparities_2010.html): Source: 2010 Census, Summary File 1.



Hispanic community grew by 40% and the Black community grew by 4.3%<sup>3</sup>. By continuing the practice of counting incarcerated people at the site of their incarceration and not in their home communities, the Census Bureau is failing to ensure accurate data and representation for North Carolinians that have been persistently undercounted.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to share input on this important issue for the 2030 Census.

Sincerely,

NC Counts Coalition  
The Caraway Foundation  
Gang Free, Inc.  
Acción Hispana - Que Pasa  
Nariah's Way Foundation  
Hola Carolina  
Asociación Dominicana NC  
Friends of the Earth  
Community Ventures  
ENLACE  
RREPS (Recidivism Reduction Educational Program Services)  
EmancipateNC  
Hispanic Federation  
Common Cause NC  
Fayetteville Freedom For All  
North Carolina Business Council  
Southern Coalition for Social Justice  
Unidxs WNC  
NC Black Alliance  
Advance Carolina  
Interfaith Initiative for Social Justice  
North Carolina Asian Americans Together  
HandsOn Northwest North Carolina  
Saint James Christian Church  
NC FIELD, Inc.  
Future Endeavors Life Program (F.E.L.P)  
Democracy North Carolina

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncdemography.org/2021/08/12/first-look-at-2020-census-for-north-carolina/>: Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Note: the data for Hispanic or Latinx includes individuals of all race groups while specific racial designations are for individuals who report only that race ("race alone", in Census Bureau terminology) and no Hispanic origin.