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ELEVENTH DISTRICT

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
HOUSE OF DELEGATES
RICHMOND

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
MILITIA, POLICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

June 22, 2015

Karen Humes
Chief, Population Division
4600 Silver Hill Road
Suitland, MD 20746

Dear Chief Humes,

I represent the Eleventh District in the Virginia House of Delegates and submit this comment in response to the Census Bureau's federal register notice regarding the Residence Rule and Residence Situations, 80 FR 28950 (May 20, 2015). I urge you to count incarcerated people at their home address, rather than at the particular facility that they happen to be located at on Census day.

As an elected representative, I am keenly aware that democracy, at its core, rests on equal representation. And equal representation, in turn, rests on an accurate count of the nation's population.

As you know, American demographics and living situations have changed drastically in the 225 years since the first Census, and the Census has evolved in response to many of these changes in order to continue to provide an accurate picture of the nation. Today, the growth in the prison population requires the Census to update its methodology again.

The need for change in the "usual residence" rule, as it relates to incarcerated persons, has been growing over the last few decades. As recently as the 1980s, the incarcerated population in the U.S. totaled less than half a million. But since then, the number of incarcerated people has more than quadrupled, to over two million people behind bars. The manner in which this population is counted now has huge implications for the accuracy of the Census.

By designating a prison cell as a residence in the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau concentrated a population that is disproportionately male, urban, and African-American or Latino into just 5,393 Census blocks that are located far from the actual homes of incarcerated people. In Virginia, this resulted in a single state house district where people counted in state and federal facilities account for 12% of the district's total population.

Currently, four states (California, Delaware, Maryland, and New York) are taking a state-wide approach to adjust the Census' population totals to count incarcerated people at home, and over

200 counties and municipalities all individually adjust population data to avoid prison gerrymandering when drawing their local government districts.

But this ad hoc approach is neither efficient nor universality implementable. It makes far more sense for the Bureau to provide accurate redistricting data in the first place, rather than leaving it up to each state to have to adjust the Census' data to count incarcerated people in their home district.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Residence Rule and Residence Situations as the Bureau strives to count everyone in the right place in keeping with changes in society and population realities. Because democracy relies on a population count that accurately represents communities, I urge you to count incarcerated people as residents of their home address.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'SR', with a stylized flourish on the left side.

Sam Rasoul
Member, Virginia House of Delegates
Eleventh District