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CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME & CORRECTION
EDUCATION
FINANCE
HEALTH
RULES
SOCIAL SERVICES

July 17, 2015

Karen Humes
Chief of the Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Ms. Humes,

I represent the 25th Senate District in New York State and submit this comment in response to the Census Bureau's federal register 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.

In 2010, New York State joined California, Delaware and Maryland to pass legislation to adjust the Census' population totals to count incarcerated people as residents of their original homes; 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 universally 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.

Karen Humes
Chief of the Population Division
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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.

Sincerely,



Senator Velmanette Montgomery
25th Senate District