



P.O. BOX 13622
New Orleans, La. 70185
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July 14, 2015

Dear Karen Humes,

Voice of the Ex-Offender (V.O.T.E.) submits 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). We 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.

We at V.O.T.E. are interested in ending prison gerrymandering/ensuring equal representation in the entire United States. We are a membership-based organization founded and run by formerly incarcerated persons, and we believe that the communities that our members come from are the ones most impacted by the malapportionment that prison gerrymandering causes.

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, due to the massive growth in the prison population, the Census needs 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. In 1980, there were less than 10,000 people incarcerated in Louisiana, but by 2012, there were approximately 40,000 people incarcerated in the state of Louisiana alone. New Orleans, where V.O.T.E. is located, incarcerates more people per capita than anywhere in the world. As a result, the manner in which the incarcerated is counted has huge implications for the accuracy of the Census and for the political representation of the communities hardest hit by incarceration. In fact, over half of Louisiana's state prison population comes from just four parishes: Orleans, Caddo, East Baton Rouge, and Jefferson.

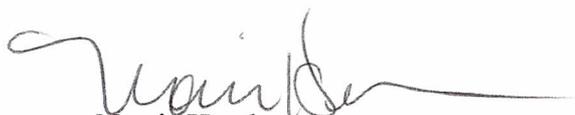
By designating a prison cell as a residence in the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau concentrated a population that is disproportionately male, urban, and African-American or Latino into facilities that are typically located far from the actual homes of incarcerated people.

Because Louisiana has not passed legislation like California, Delaware, Maryland, and New York to adjust the Census' population totals to count incarcerated people at home for state legislative redistricting purposes, this flawed data distorts the legislative redistricting process at the state and, even more so, at the local level. For example, twelve of Louisiana's State House Districts and ten of Louisiana's State Senate Districts drawn after the 2010 Census fail to meet constitutional population requirements without prison populations. Locally, in Allen Parish, a federal prison population is 66% of one district, and a state prison is 39% of another district. In Catahoula Parish, half of one district is incarcerated, meaning five people in that district have as much voting power as ten people in any other one of Catahoula Parish's districts.

We urge you to bring uniformity and simplicity to this process by counting incarcerated people at home in the next Census.

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 Voice of the Ex-Offender believes in a population count that accurately represents communities, as we did in February 2013, we once again urge you to count incarcerated people as residents of their home address.

Sincerely,



Norris Henderson

Executive Director

Voice of the Ex-Offender

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