

## Our View: Prisons skew census numbers

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**The Bulletin**

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Many state and federal formulas used to distribute funds to cities and towns are based on census figures. That makes sense because one would expect that larger population centers would have greater needs than smaller, less-populated rural communities.

But there are cases where that logic isn't applied because a percentage of the population in a handful of smaller communities is literally held captive — counted as residents of the community where they currently reside courtesy of the state Department of Correction.

In Connecticut, as is the case in most states, prisoners are counted by the U.S. Census as residents of the community where correctional facilities are located instead of the community from which they hail.

### No financial burden

There is no significant financial burden on communities with prisons because they are compensated for serving as a host community. But they also benefit from a slightly higher level of funding from state and federal programs in which formulas are determined based on a community's overall population — programs that have nothing to do with prisons.

The level of funding varies depending on the program, but it can be significant for both the host community and those communities that don't benefit from the artificially higher population count.

### Legislative boundaries

Those skewed population figures also impact legislative boundaries that are re-apportioned every 10 years based on the U.S. Census. These individuals are ineligible to vote because they are convicted felons serving prison sentences, yet they are counted as residents in calculating and redrawing political boundaries.

Maryland adopted a law that counts prisoners as residents of communities of their last legal address, not the community where they are incarcerated — a law the U.S. Supreme Court upheld as constitutional earlier this month.

Connecticut has twice tried to adopt a similar measure, but with no success. We hope that lawmakers will try again next year.

That's our opinion. We'd like to hear yours. Send your comments to letters @norwichbulletin.com.

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