



Testimony on H 7090 on behalf of Common Cause Rhode Island

March 6, 2012

Common Cause Rhode Island supports H 7090, a bill to count incarcerated persons at their last known home address, for purposes of redistricting. Currently Rhode Island state law requires that for voting, a person should be considered to live at "his or her fixed and established domicile." This bill would bring the current round of redistricting into compliance with Rhode Island state law.

Prison-based gerrymandering is a problem because it distorts the political power of municipalities where correctional institutions are placed. At present voters in the three districts (one Senate, two House) have outsized influence compared to voters in all other 110 General Assembly districts. The reapportionment revolution that began with *Baker v. Carr* in 1963 is not done, and this is just an extension of that. We have made great strides from the days when 7.5 percent of the population controlled the General Assembly at the beginning of the last century.

This legislation will not affect the money flowing to Cranston from the State of Rhode Island. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, there are currently no funding formulas based on legislative districts.

In the last several years several states have taken the step of ending prison-based gerrymandering, including Maryland, New York, and Delaware. California has passed legislation that will go in effect in the 2020 cycle. It is time for Rhode Island to join this group of states and end prison-based gerrymandering.