



Testimony of

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Good evening. My name is Kim Hynes, and I am Senior Organizer for Common Cause in Connecticut, which is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has more than 400,000 members around the country and 35 state chapters. We have approximately 7200 members and activists in Connecticut.

I am here today to urge members of the Reapportionment Committee to ensure that the process of redistricting in Connecticut be as open, transparent, and accessible as possible. Secrecy in government is inherently contradictory to democracy. A country that is not accountable to its people risks losing its basic legitimacy. Open government, transparent processes and a fully informed and engaged citizenry helps ensure this never happens. A redistricting process that leads to well-defined and well-represented communities will better promote a self-determinative democracy in which individuals and groups create solutions to the greatest problems facing our cities, towns, counties and states.

How political boundaries are drawn impacts who has a voice, and the strength of that voice in the political process. One critical issue for redistricting in Connecticut is Connecticut's large prison population, and how incarcerated individuals are counted by the Census Bureau for the purpose of redistricting. Currently, incarcerated people are counted as residents of the correctional facility not their home addresses.

During the last Census in 2000, the U.S counted almost 20,000 people in state or federal prison cells in the state. Taken as a group, that population would be nearly large enough to constitute an entire district. However, people in prison come from all over the state. Using prison populations to inflate the voting power of a handful of towns in Connecticut distorts democracy for all of Connecticut's cities and towns.

Counting prisoners in towns in which they are incarcerated is in fact a violation of Connecticut state law. Connecticut state statute § 9-14 says:

No person shall be deemed to have lost his residence in any town by reason of his absence there from in any institution maintained by the state. (Sec. 9-14.)

Evidence of this statute can be seen in certain voting laws in Connecticut. Those prisoners who are allowed to vote while incarcerated (either for misdemeanors or because they are awaiting trial) must vote by absentee ballot in their home towns, and are not allowed to cast ballots in the town in which they are imprisoned. This is clearly at odds with the practice of counting prisoners as residents of towns in which they are housed as prisoners for the purpose of redistricting.

We urge the Reapportionment Committee to follow the lead of state like Maryland, Delaware, and New York, and correct the federal census data to count incarcerated people at home for redistricting purposes. By doing so the Committee can assure that every district in Connecticut fairly represents the population therein, and that each voter has the same chance to be heard.