

Thank you, Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Amy Meek, and I am the Coordinator for the City of New Haven's Prison Reentry Initiative. Launched in 2008, the Prison Reentry Initiative works with community partners, state agencies and other reentry stakeholders to support the reintegration of formerly incarcerated residents into the New Haven community. My experience working with members of my community who are returning from prison to New Haven informs my support for ending prison-based gerrymandering.

As you know, New Haven is a small city that sees a lot of our population temporarily incarcerated. Our city is only 4% of the state, but 14% of the state's prisoners call New Haven home. Even though we have a correctional facility within city limits, as a whole counting people in prison as residents of the prison location denies New Haven adequate representation in the legislature. The Office of Legislative Research reported in March 2010 that 2,051 New Haven residents were incarcerated in Connecticut, but only 777 individuals were incarcerated within New Haven. Due to current counting methods, then, New Haven was denied representation for 1,274 of its residents, or about 1 percent of the city's population.

To put that 1 percent figure in perspective, please keep in mind that according to recently released Census data, New Haven grew by 5 percent from 2000 to 2010, and that this was the highest population growth rate of the three major Connecticut cities in this period. Because this Census data will be used in redistricting, New Haven will essentially lose 20 percent of its population growth in redistricting to prison-based gerrymandering.

This problem is not limited, however, to communities with high rates of incarceration. The majority of our state prison cells are concentrated in just 5 small towns. A massive prison complex near the Massachusetts border creates a district where 15% of the population are actually prisoners, giving a smaller number of real residents of that district more political influence than residents in other districts with the required population.

I urge you, on behalf of every person in the state who does not live near a large prison, to end the practice of prison-based gerrymandering. Pass HB6606/SB 1193 and count incarcerated people at home for redistricting purposes. Stop giving extra representation to some communities just because they happen to contain a correctional facility.