



Testimony of :
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Before the
Judiciary Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly

March 21, 2011

**Re: HB 6606 AAC The Determination of the Residence of Incarcerated Persons for the
Purposes of Legislative Redistricting**
SB 1193 AAC Determining the Town of Residence of Incarcerated Persons

Good Morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Committee. My name is Susan Pease and I am the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Central Connecticut State University and a Board Member of Common Cause in Connecticut.

I am here to testify in support of House Bill 6606 and Senate Bill 1193. Both bills before you today are critical steps towards greatly electoral equality and fairness in the redistricting process. I urge you to support these bills.

The history of the Connecticut legislature is, as can be seen in the exhibits out in the hall, the history of striving towards more and more equality in representation. Not to long ago, less than 10% of the state was responsible for electing the majority of the state House of Representatives. The federal courts were spurred by the civil rights struggles in the South to begin enforcing the constitutional principle of "one man-one vote" equal representation. They required us to abandon the system of basing representation on towns and instead to shift to basing representation on population. The benefits were obvious and profound.

Immediately, the Connecticut Legislature began to be more responsive to the needs of the state and to look more like the state. Under the old town-based system, only once was an African-American elected to serve in the House. In the very first election in 1965 after the population

based districts were enacted, the state elected its first African-American to the Senate and six African-Americans to the State House.

We've made great strides towards electoral representation here in Connecticut, but we have much more work to do. One critical issue before you today is the problem caused by the intersection of Connecticut's large prison population and our reliance on Census Bureau data that counts incarcerated people 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 almost large enough to constitute an entire district. Of course, people in prison come from all over the state, but the problem occurs because the Census Bureau counts them as residents of a relatively small number of places where they do not legally reside: in the correctional facilities.

The results for our democracy and fair elections can be catastrophic. The Prison Policy Initiative studied the districts drawn after the 2000 Census and found that:

- 15% of one district was incarcerated, giving every group of 85 residents near the prison as much political influence as 100 residents in any other district in the state.
- The majority of the state's prison cells are in the 5 towns of Cheshire, East Lyme, Enfield, Somers and Suffield that together are home for just 1% of the state's prisoners
- In a state where African-Americans are almost 13 times as likely to be incarcerated as whites, and Latinos are incarcerated 7.5 times as often as whites, crediting people in prison to the districts that contain the prisons has negative effects on minority representation. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, 75% of the state's prison cells are in legislative districts that are disproportionately White.

As you know, three states – Maryland, Delaware and New York – have recently passed legislation to end prison-based gerrymandering. If Connecticut acts quickly, we can join those states and correct the federal census data to count incarcerated people at home for redistricting purposes. We can ensure that our districts are drawn on the principle of equal representation for equal numbers of people. We can end the practice of giving extra representation to the small number of people who live next to prisons. We can ensure that every voice in this state is given the same chance to be heard in this chamber.

Connecticut has made great strides in the last 50 years towards putting the principles of One Person One Vote in to effect. It is time for us to make the next step and base our districts on fairer data that counts incarcerated people at home. I urge you to pass this legislation that would end prison-based gerrymandering in our state.