

Testimony of Julia Knight (julia.knight@yale.edu), Yale University Class of 2011

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on HB. No 6606, An Act Concerning the Determination of the Residence of Incarcerated Persons
for Purposes of Legislative Redistricting

Thank you Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony on An Act Concerning the Determination of the Residence of Incarcerated Persons. My name is Julia Knight, and I am a senior Ethics, Politics & Economics major at Yale University. During my time at Yale, I have been involved with municipal and reentry issues both on an academic and on a practical level. I also have spent the past few months conducting in-depth research on prison-based gerrymandering for my senior thesis. I come here today not only as a researcher of prison-based gerrymandering but also as a Connecticut voter concerned about the distortions of democracy that are taking place throughout our state.

As you have heard and will hear from others, ending the practice of prison-based gerrymandering will not affect how federal funding is distributed in Connecticut. It is also legal for a state legislature to end this practice, a practice that defies the “one person, one vote” principle established by the Supreme Court in 1964 to uphold the Equal Protection Clause.

There is yet another reason to end the practice of prison-based gerrymandering: it stands to affect every voter in Connecticut. The vote dilution impact of this practice is not limited to cities. If you live in a district—rural or urban—that does not include a prison in its boundaries, your vote is worth less than the vote of someone living in a legislative district that practices prison-based gerrymandering.

Approximately 100 localities across the United States have recognized the vote-distorting effects of prison-based gerrymandering and have voluntarily chosen to count prisoners as residents of their pre-incarceration home addresses. Here in Connecticut, the City of Enfield, which contains two prisons, has decided to exclude prisoners from its local redistricting process. If Enfield had not adjusted its Census data in such a democratic way, “30% of the third district’s population would have been incarcerated, giving every group of 70 residents near the prison as much influence as 100 residents elsewhere in the city.”¹

Through this Act Concerning the Determination of the Residence of Incarcerated Persons, Connecticut has the opportunity to join 100 localities across the United States—ranging from Escambia County, Alabama to Gardner, Massachusetts—“that refuse to engage in prison-based gerrymandering when drawing their local district lines.”² Connecticut also has the opportunity to join Maryland, Delaware and New York in passing statewide legislation against prison-based gerrymandering. Through this legislation, Connecticut has the opportunity to ensure that each voter in the state has no more, and no less, than one vote.

¹ “Prison-Based Gerrymandering in Connecticut” fact sheet from Prisoners of the Census, <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/50states/CT.html>

² <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/legislation.html>