



Testimony of:

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Before the
Judiciary Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly

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Senate Bill 980 AAC Prison Gerrymandering

To: Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary 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.

Common Cause in Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has nearly 500,000 members around the country and 35 state chapters. We have approximately 7500 members and activists in Connecticut.

I am submitting testimony in support of **SB 980 AAC Prison Gerrymandering**. This bill is a critical step towards greater electoral equality and fairness in the redistricting process. I urge your support.

We've made great strides towards electoral representation here in Connecticut, including passage of public financing of elections, campaign disclosure laws and the Citizens' Election Program as well as Election Day Registration but we have much more work to do. One critical issue before you today is the problem caused by the intersection of Connecticut's 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. The numbers of men incarcerated are slightly decreased as of 2014 but 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.

As Tom Condon stated in the Hartford Courant in May of 2013, *"Let's take the state's 7th Senatorial District, ably represented by Sen. John Kissell, which includes the northern-tier prison towns of Enfield, Somers and Suffield. The district of about 100,000 people includes about 8,000 inmates. So, 92,000 non-inmates in the 7th District have the voting power of 100,000 persons in a non-prison district, in apparent violation of the "one man, one vote" mandate"*.

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 it is not only the 7th Senatorial District:

- 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, SB 980, which would end prison-based gerrymandering in our state.**