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CGA Judiciary Committee

PUBLIC HEARING

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S.B. No. 459 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COUNTING OF INCARCERATED PERSONS FOR PURPOSES OF DETERMINING LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS AND DISTRIBUTING STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS

Comments submitted by Gloria Bent, President LWVCT

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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT IS A NON-PARTISAN STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION COMMITTED TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICY AND THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THEIR GOVERNMENT.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to comment on S.B. 459. We support the basic intent of the legislation — to end the practice of prison gerrymandering in Connecticut. We are, however, very disappointed to see the end of this practice linked in this bill to the distribution of state and federal funds. We believe that linkage creates confusion where none is necessary. The Prison Policy Initiative has determined that there is no significant impact of prison populations on Connecticut's current funding formulas. We believe the wording in the name and body of this bill should be amended so that the focus is where it should be - on the impact of prison gerrymandering on redistricting and therefore legislative representation.

Counting incarcerated persons as members of the community where they are incarcerated on Census Day and then using those numbers for redistricting purposes leads to over representation for the legislative districts where correctional facilities are located and underrepresentation for all others. Incarcerated persons are highly unlikely to remain in the communities where they are detained, preferring to return to the community they consider to be home. Since most correctional facilities in Connecticut are located in rural, predominately white communities, counting inmates incarcerated in those facilities as residents of those communities also distorts the community's ethnic profile since persons of color are incarcerated at a higher rate than whites.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut believes that it is vital that legislative districts reflect the diversity of the populace they represent and serve, especially with regard to racial and ethnic diversity. The League believes that for districting purposes, incarcerated persons should be counted in their hometown populations, not in the communities where they are incarcerated.

Four states - Maryland, California, Delaware and New York - have adopted legislation similar to the proposed legislation before you in order to eliminate the unfortunate impact on representation. The League believes it is time to end prison gerrymandering in Connecticut. Connecticut has a model program for public financing of elections through the Citizens' Election Program, online voter registration and Election Day Registration. These are all policies and procedures that increase voter confidence in the fairness of the political process. Ensuring fairness in redistricting by counting everyone in their home communities is a much needed next step!

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments.