



Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 15, 2019

Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director

Common Cause in Connecticut

In support of HB 5611 An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons For Purposes of Determining Legislative Districts

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire. I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. We have 1.1 million members nationwide and more than 12,000 members and activists in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut has a long history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics and election reform.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before the GAE committee on this important bill in support of the goal of ending prison gerrymandering. **HB 5611 An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons For Purposes of Determining Legislative Districts** is a step towards greater electoral equality and fairness in the redistricting process.

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 and Online voter 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, according to CT statute, their home address.

During the last Census in 2010, the U.S counted over 18,000 people in state or federal prison cells in Connecticut. The numbers of men incarcerated are slightly decreased as of 2015 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 last year, *“Let's take the state's 7th Senatorial District, ably represented by Senator 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 2010 Census and found that the problem of prison gerrymandering stretches far beyond the 7th Senatorial District:

- Although almost every town in Connecticut had residents incarcerated elsewhere on Census Day, the majority of the state's prison cells are in 5 small towns: Cheshire, East Lyme, Enfield, Somers, and Suffield.
- The majority-white residents of 7 state House districts got significantly more representation in the legislature because each of their districts included at least 1,000 incarcerated African Americans and Latinos from other parts of the state.
- For example, State House District 59, (Enfield) claimed more than 3,300 African Americans and Latinos as constituents. But 72% of the African Americans and 60% of Latinos were not actually residents of the district, but rather were temporarily incarcerated in the Enfield, Willard-Cybulski, and Robinson Correctional Institutions.
- The dilution of African-American and Latino political power was not limited to the 59th district: 86% of the state's prison cells are located in disproportionately white House districts.

As you may know, four states – California, 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.

###