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Ending prison-based gerrymandering would aid the African-American vote in Maryland

The U.S. Census Bureau counts incarcerated people where they are confined not where they are from. Using these counts to draw legislative districts enhances the votes of districts with prisons and dilutes the votes of all other districts, especially the districts that the prisoners call home.

The demographics:

- Maryland's prisoners are disproportionately from Baltimore, but the majority are incarcerated elsewhere. (Baltimore City is 12% of the state, but home to 68% of the state's prisoners. Only 17% of the state's prisoners are incarcerated in the city, so the city loses far more than it gains from the current Census Bureau procedure.)
- 18% of District 2B in Washington County is incarcerated. This gives every group of 4 residents in District 2B as much political influence as 5 residents elsewhere in the state.
- Maryland's disproportionately African-American prisoners are counted in disproportionately white districts.
- Of the 5,628 African-Americans in District 2B, 90% are incarcerated residents from other parts of the state.

Basing legislative districts on the home addresses of incarcerated people would have major benefits for African-American voters:

- Because prisoners are disproportionately African-American, counting prisoners at home would benefit their home, predominantly African-American, districts.
- Counting prisoners at home would end the current practice of padding disproportionately white legislative districts with African-American prisoners who are not allowed to vote.
- Properly counting incarcerated people and ending the practice of inflating white districts with prison populations would change neighboring districts that do not contain prisons. Some rural districts would become more suburban in orientation, and some suburban districts would become more sympathetic to urban interests.
- African-American voters in Somerset County could receive fair representation in the county legislature. 40% of the county is African-American, but an African-American has never been elected to county office. The county settled a Voting Rights Act lawsuit in the mid-1980s and agreed to draw a majority African-American district. Unfortunately, a new large prison in the remedial district resulted in the African-American resident population being split among multiple districts. An effective African-American district could be drawn if the prison population had not been included in the Somerset population count.

Ending prison-based gerrymandering would bring a net benefit to Baltimore City

- Only one majority African-American district has a large prison population, and there the political impact is quite modest. About 4,000 people are incarcerated in state prisons in the 40th District in Baltimore City. Some of these people are residents of the 111,000 person district, but many are not. Not padding this district with the prison populations would require the district to be drawn to contain additional blocks to make up the population, causing a subtle shift in neighboring districts. But this would not cause a change in the number of majority African-American districts.

In sum:

Counting incarcerated people at their home addresses would benefit African-American voters because the current practice credits large numbers of African-Americans to the wrong districts thereby diluting African-American voting strength.