Steven Gelb

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San Diego, CA 92129

July 14, 2015

Karen Humes,

Chief, Population Division,

U.S. Census Bureau, Room 5H174,

Washington, DC 20233

Dear Karen Humes,

I submit this comment in response to the Census Bureau’s federal register notice regarding the Residence Rule and Residence Situations, 80 FR 28950 (May 20, 2015). I urge you to count incarcerated people at their home address, rather than at the particular facility that they happen to be imprisoned at on Census day.

As you know, American demographics and living situations have changed drastically in the 225 years since the first Census, and the Census has evolved in response to many of these changes in order to continue to provide an accurate picture of the nation. Today, the growth in the prison population requires the Census to update its methodology again.

The need for change in the “usual residence” rule, as it relates to incarcerated persons, has been growing over the last few decades. As recently as the 1980s, the incarcerated population in the U.S. totaled less than half a million. But since then, the number of incarcerated people has more than quadrupled, to over two million people behind bars. The manner in which this population is counted now has huge implications for the accuracy of the Census.

As a volunteer for the Alternatives to Violence Project and someone who has facilitated workshops in a handful of California state prisons, I know that California prisons are often located far away from the home communities of incarcerated people. Fortunately, California is one of the states that have ended prison gerrymandering, and there are over 200 counties and municipalities that have also individually adjusted their population data to avoid prison gerrymandering.

But, nationally, by designating a prison cell as a residence in the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau concentrated a population that is disproportionately male, urban, and African-American or Latino into just 5,393 Census blocks that are located far from the actual homes of incarcerated people. In California, African-Americans are incarcerated at a rate almost seven times as much as whites are.

Further, it is not always possible for states to end prison gerrymandering on their own. The Massachusetts legislature, for example, concluded that the state constitution did not allow it to pass similar legislation, so it sent the Bureau a resolution in 2014 urging the Bureau to tabulate incarcerated persons at their home addresses. *See* The Massachusetts General Court Resolution “Urging the Census Bureau to Provide Redistricting Data that Counts Prisoners in a Manner Consistent with the Principles of 'One Person, One Vote'” (Adopted by the Senate on July 31,2014 and the House of Representatives on August 14, 2014).

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Residence Rule and Residence Situations. I am glad to see that the Bureau is taking a step forward to count everyone in the right and most accurate place. I believe that the Census should accurately represent communities, and therefore I urge you to count incarcerated people as residents of their home address.

Sincerely,

Steven Gelb