

## CITY COUNCILS AND COUNTY COMMISSIONS TACKLE PRISON GERRYMANDERING

### Local governments continue to address prison gerrymandering in their own local government redistricting data, often without state support

Population equality among legislative districts enables everyone to have equal representation from elected officials. Prison gerrymandering is a problem created because the Census Bureau incorrectly counts incarcerated people as residents of their prison cells rather than their home communities. As a result, when municipalities or counties use Census data to draw new local government districts, they inadvertently give residents of districts with prisons greater political clout than all other residents in the community.

#### **Outsize impact on local governments.**

Because of their smaller populations, the Census Bureau's policy of counting incarcerated people at the location has a greater impact in skewing local democracy. Putting prisons in rural areas means that a single prison can have an outsize impact on the local population counts. When drawing districts, rural communities a single prison can easily account for a full county commissioner district population.

#### **Rural governments at the forefront of reform efforts.**

In addition to the 200+ local governments that avoided prison gerrymandering after the 2000 and 2010 Censuses we identified an additional 21 local governments scattered across 10 states that started doing so after the 2020 Census:

Arkansas:	Izard and Jackson Counties
Delaware:	City of Wilmington
Florida:	Columbia and Jefferson Counties
Georgia:	Coffee, Emanuel, Long, Monroe, Montgomery, and Wayne Counties
Louisiana:	Allen and Catahoula Parishes
Oklahoma:	Atoka and Woodward Counties
Rhode Island:	City of Central Falls
North Carolina:	Granville County
South Carolina:	Williamsburg County
Tennessee:	Hardeman, Johnson, and Morgan Counties

#### **Rural communities are at risk of being left behind in wave of reforms.**

Rural communities – where most prisons are located – were at the forefront of adjusting redistricting populations to avoid prison gerrymandering. But as states have started taking on reform and reallocating people to count them at home in redistricting data, rural areas of the country are now at risk of being left behind.

Not only do rural communities bear the biggest impact of prison gerrymandering, but increasingly all residents of rural states are left behind in state efforts to end prison gerrymandering. Our analysis of the ten worst prison gerrymanders in the nation show the problem is increasingly harming residents of rural states and defying some of the preconceived notions about partisan impacts – of these ten districts, six are districts controlled by Democrats, while Republicans control four.

#### **Census needs to fix the problem it created.**

Roughly half of all U.S. residents now live in a city, county, or state that has ended prison gerrymandering. Even as more local governments and states address prison gerrymandering they can only partially solve the problem. Prison gerrymandering is a national problem that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. No city, county, or state can completely fix this issue on its own. Only the Census Bureau can fully solve this problem nationwide.