

Testimony in Support of H 5285

Delivered by John Marion on behalf of Common Cause Rhode Island

Common Cause Rhode Island supports H 5285, a bill to count incarcerated persons at their last known home address, for purposes of redistricting. Currently Rhode Island state law requires that for voting, a person should be considered to live at “his or her fixed and established domicile.” This bill will bring the next round of redistricting, which will begin later this year, into compliance with Rhode Island state law.

Prison-based gerrymandering is a problem because it distorts the political power of municipalities where correctional institutions are placed. At present voters in the three districts (one Senate, two House) have outsized influence compared to voters in all other 110 General Assembly districts. At the same time, voters in communities disproportionately affected by incarceration are underrepresented.

The reapportionment revolution that established the principle of “one-person-one-vote” and began with *Baker v. Carr* in 1963 is not done, and this is just an extension of that. We have made great strides from the dawn of the 20th Century when 7.5 percent of the Rhode Island population controlled a majority of the General Assembly.

This legislation will not affect the money flowing to Cranston from the State of Rhode Island. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, there are currently no funding formulas based on legislative districts. As written this legislation expressly forbids correcting the numbers to account for prison-based gerrymandering from financially affecting Cranston.

In the last decade ten states have passed similar legislation, with Illinois adopting the practice just last week.

The Rhode Island Senate has passed this legislation numerous times. Now is the time for the House to pass the legislation before the state engages in its once-a-decade redistricting process.

It is time Rhode Island joined this growing movement to end prison-based gerrymandering.

Thank you for considering our testimony.

