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Committees:
Claims, Chair
Finance
Rules

CITY COUNCIL
869 Park Avenue
Cranston, Rhode Island
02910-2786

November 13, 2022

Dear Chairmen and Honorable Members of the Special Commission on Reapportionment:

I am writing to you in support of efforts to end the practice known as “prison-based gerrymandering,” which may be loosely defined as a practice whereby non-resident incarcerated persons are counted as part of the population when election districts are drawn.

While this practice has statewide implications, given the physical location of the ACI it has a particular impact locally in Cranston. Over the last decade, the inclusion of approximately 3,500 non-resident incarcerated persons in Cranston’s population data for redistricting purposes has resulted in 10,000 residents of Ward 6 having the same representation as 13,500 residents of other Wards. This practice gives residents of Ward 6 a disproportionate amount of political representation, and thus power and influence, that residents of other wards do not. Why should Ward 6 have greater political power than the constituents I represent in Ward 3, or my colleagues in any other Ward?

The residents of the City of Cranston are constitutionally entitled to equal and proportional representation on the Cranston City Council and Cranston School Committee. The practice of prison-based gerrymandering undermines our democratic principle of equal representation by giving every 3 residents of Ward 6 the same representation and influence over city affairs as 4 residents in the other Wards. This practice is antithetical to our democratic principles and should be stopped.

Sincerely,

John Patrick Donegan, Ward 3
Minority Leader
Cranston City Council

P.S., It has come to my attention that honorable Cranston Mayor Kenneth Hopkins and Council President Christopher Paplauskas, both of whom I respect tremendously, have submitted testimony in opposition to ending prison-based gerrymandering. Both the honorable Mayor and Council President suggest that persons incarcerated at the ACI should be counted in Cranston because they receive municipal services. In his letter dated November 8, Mayor Hopkins states,

“...Prison inmates living in Cranston should be counted as part of Cranston’s population because Cranston taxpayers pay for the municipal services provided to the inmates at the ACI. Cranston’s Fire Department provides fire and rescue services to the prison inmates and the ACI facility. The Cranston Police Department responds to the ACI to assist the Rhode Island State Police and for their own service calls...”

All of this is true. In Cranston, we enjoy tremendous services from our respected Cranston Fire and Cranston Police Departments, respectively. However, our Fire and Police Departments also provide mutual aid to neighboring communities such as Warwick, West Warwick, and Providence. Should residents in those communities be counted in Cranston because they receive services from our municipal departments?