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Dear Members of the Special Commission on Reapportionment:

When your commission began its work last month, the ACLU of Rhode Island sent you a letter urging you to address the crucial issue of prison-based gerrymandering. We noted that failure to do so means another decade will pass before this discriminatory practice can get addressed. We therefore have been very pleased to see both members of the public and members of the commission call for action at recent meetings and hearings as the process for drafting district lines gets underway.

As we have noted in supporting independent legislation that has been submitted for a number of years to address this problem, the current system, which counts all ACI inmates as living at the prison facility instead of where they previously resided (even though their past residence is where state law requires they vote from if eligible), is arbitrary and unfair and diminishes the legitimate representation of other districts, particularly in the state's urban and BIPOC communities.

The major argument that has been pressed for not addressing this issue now is concern that it is too late to do so. But it is not. As our previous letter noted, Pennsylvania's redistricting commission recently voted to address this issue in its plans. It may be true that the commission will not be able to achieve 100% accuracy in reallocating the prison population to their home addresses, but the lack of 100% accuracy has not stopped other states from engaging in this process and, of course, the census figures being used to redraw district lines are not 100% accurate either. By failing to address prison gerrymandering at all now, however, we know that the redistricting allocation of people at the ACI will be almost **100% inaccurate** if they are all counted there.

For geographical reasons, prison gerrymandering is an especially critical issue in Rhode Island. A failure to address it places our state far outside the mainstream when it comes to prison-related malapportionment. Following the lead of the growing number of states and more than two hundred local governments across the country, we therefore once again urge the commission to count, to the greatest extent possible, incarcerated people's last home residence as their home for redistricting purposes, rather than counting them as "residing" at the ACI.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steven" and last name "Brown" clearly legible.

Steven Brown
Executive Director