

## COUNTING INCARCERATED PEOPLE AT HOME: WHY USING LAST KNOWN ADDRESS WORKS

**Using last known home address records to count incarcerated people at home gives an accurate picture of where people reside and will return after incarceration**

Population equality among legislative districts enables everyone to have equal representation from elected officials. However, the Census frustrates this goal by counting nearly 2 million incarcerated people as residents of the places in which they are detained instead of at their home addresses. The Bureau does this even though (1) people in prison typically lack a constituent relationship with the elected officials serving prison districts, and (2) most incarcerated people remain legal residents of their home addresses while imprisoned and return home upon release.

The resulting Census data lead to the creation of state and local districts that are distorted by correctional facilities; this “prison gerrymandering” skews representation in favor of districts with prisons and other correctional facilities.

### **People are incarcerated far from home.**

Over 60% of incarcerated people are held in a prison 100 miles or further from home.

### **People move around while incarcerated.**

People who are incarcerated on Census Day are at home most of the time. The median time served by people in state prison is 15 months. Even shorter stays in prison are common. For example, in Rhode Island, the median length of stay for people serving a sentence in the state’s correctional facilities is only 99 days.

Even people away from home for a year or longer are not in one place. They often move between multiple facilities. Nationally, 75% of people serve time in more than one prison facility, 12% of people serve time in at least five facilities before returning home.

### **People leave prison towns after release.**

Mass incarceration so disproportionately impacts Black and Latino Americans that we can compare the race and ethnicity of correctional facilities and easily tell that

incarcerated people do not live in communities where prisons are located. About half a million people enter and leave the prison systems every year. If even a small portion of people stayed near the prison after release, then the populations surrounding the facilities would look similar to those on the inside, but that is very much not the case.

### **People go home after release.**

Prison systems keep people’s home addresses on file, but don’t track whether someone returns to that address upon release. So, we compared where people end up on probation and parole with home addresses reported by incarcerated people. We found that people came and returned to the cities and towns proportionately across the state.

### **More correct than facility address.**

The home address someone has on file may not end up being the exact place they return to after incarceration. But it is a close approximation of where they reside through and after incarceration. While some of these address records may vary in precision, the one address we know is wrong is the facility address.

States that adjust their redistricting data to count incarcerated people at home use the home addresses contained in their Departments of Corrections records. This practice creates redistricting data that better reflects the populations of communities hardest hit by mass incarceration as well as counties that contain large prison populations. The Census Bureau should count incarcerated people at home in the 2030 Census using home address data as the states have done.

*For more info and details, check out the full briefing at  
<https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/news/2024/05/14/home-addresses/>*