



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 13, 2021

For all inquiries, please contact:
Madeleine Doubek
Executive Director, CHANGE Illinois
c: 847.769.4940
mdoubek@changeil.org

Prison gerrymandering on its way to ending in Illinois

CHANGE Illinois and justice reform advocates have been calling for an end to prison gerrymandering in Illinois, the unjust practice of counting incarcerated people at temporary prison addresses instead of permanent home addresses for the census and redistricting. We are thrilled Illinois is on its way to becoming the 11th state to end prison gerrymandering with the passage today of HB3653. We urge Gov. J.B. Pritzker to sign HB3653 into law to restore representation to incarcerated people and their home communities.

“Prison gerrymandering must end to achieve equity. It’s about fixing a systemic injustice that predominantly has wrongly harmed people of color for far too long,” said Madeleine Doubek, executive director of CHANGE Illinois.

“No longer will the voting and representation rights of tens of thousands of Illinois residents be violated and suppressed” said DeAngelo Bester, executive director of the Workers Center for Racial Justice.

Prison gerrymandering unfairly skews representation toward downstate districts with prisons and away from Black and Brown communities where people who are incarcerated actually live. According to the most recent data available from the Prison Policy Initiative, 70 percent of the prison population in Illinois is made up of Black and Brown residents. Black Illinoisans make up the single largest demographic group of those incarcerated, by far. The practice steals representation from people who typically are incarcerated for less than 2.5 years and assigns it downstate for a decade. This practice also harms their relatives, friends and neighbors in their home communities.

We applaud the Illinois General Assembly for including an end to prison gerrymandering in its criminal justice reform omnibus package. They chose to abolish this inequitable system ahead of the 2021 redistricting process. We want to especially express our gratitude to **Sens. Elgie Sims, Robert Peters, Kimberly Lightford** and to **Rep. Justin Slaughter** for their commitment to ending this injustice. We especially want to thank **Rep. La Shawn Ford** for his decade-long push to end prison gerrymandering.

Organizations that joined CHANGE Illinois in advocating for the end of prison gerrymandering in Illinois include Workers Center for Racial Justice, Black Roots Alliance, Common Cause Illinois,

the Chicago Urban League, Equity and Transformation, Chicago Votes, John Howard Association, Illinois Justice Project and Cabrini Green Legal Aid.

We look forward to the day soon when we hope the Governor signs this bill into law and suppressed representation is returned to people of color in Illinois.

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CHANGE Illinois, is a nonpartisan nonprofit that educates residents, researches and advocates for ethical and efficient government.