



NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL TO END PRISON-BASED GERRYMANDERING

Trenton, NJ – Today, Governor Phil Murphy signed S758/A1987, making New Jersey the seventh state to end prison-based gerrymandering, the undemocratic and discriminatory practice that counts incarcerated individuals as residents of correctional facilities during the redistricting process. New Jersey will now count people in prison at their last home address when determining our legislative voting districts.

“Prison-based gerrymandering undermines the constitutional guarantee of ‘one person, one vote’ by diminishing the voting strength of the communities where individuals lived prior to incarceration. These individuals are rarely constituents of the districts in which they are incarcerated, yet they are used during redistricting to inflate the political power of areas that house prisons,” said Helen Kioukis, Program Associate of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey.

Due to the extreme racial disparities in New Jersey’s incarceration rates, this means prison-based gerrymandering more severely denies Black and Latinx communities a full voice in our democracy, particularly communities in Essex and Camden Counties, which together comprise over one quarter (27%) of the total New Jersey Department of Corrections commitments.

Two years ago, this same bill passed both chambers, only to be vetoed by Governor Christie. Upholding prison-based gerrymandering after the 2020 Census would have meant another decade of skewed political power across the state. New Jersey now joins Washington, Nevada, California, Maryland, Delaware and New York to ensure political power is redistributed equally and fairly among all residents when it comes time to redraw our district lines.

Kioukis stated, “We applaud the Legislature and the Governor for taking action to correct this defect in our democracy. Our district boundary lines need to reflect reality, and right now they do not. But with this new law that ends prison-based gerrymandering, New Jersey is one step closer to achieving fair and equal representation and fair maps after the 2021 redistricting cycle.”

This law is one in a series of long fought-for important democratic reforms recently signed by the Governor. Along with ending prison-based gerrymandering, legislation to allow for online voter registration was also signed, as well as a bill that makes data needed for redistricting purposes more accessible to the public. Last month, the Governor signed legislation restoring voting rights to people on parole and probation.

“The Governor and Legislature are putting New Jersey on the path to a more inclusive, transparent, and accessible democracy,” said Jesse Burns, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey. “Taken together, these reforms are monumental. The League looks forward to advancing additional vital voting rights bills in the new legislative session to establish New Jersey as a national leader in making democracy work for all.”

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