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One district has more clout

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DIXON – Residents in north Dixon get more representation on the Lee County Board than what their actual population warrants, a nonprofit group maintains.

The county's population is 36,000, which works out to 9,000 for each of the county's four districts.

District 4, which consists of the Dixon Township north of the Rock River, includes the Dixon Correctional Center, a state prison with at least 2,000 inmates. And, of course, the prisoners have no choice in being there and don't use county services. They certainly aren't constituents in the conventional sense. That means the seven District 4 board members have fewer people to represent – 7,000.

“Prisons give some people in counties more representation because they actually live closer to a prison. The incarcerated people don't really live in the county. They can't vote in the county.”

Aleks Kajstura,
legal director for Prison Policy Initiative

They are Jim Wentling, Joe Patzer, Bill Palen, Tom Demmer, Hal Moroney, Marvin Williams and David Chandler.

“Prisons give some people in counties more representation because they actually live closer to a prison. The incarcerated people don't really live in the county. They can't vote in the county,” said Aleks Kajstura, the legal director for Northampton, Mass.-based Prison Policy Initiative, which has been studying the issue.

The prison makes up nearly 25 percent of Dis-

trict 4's population. That means 75 residents in District 4 have the same political clout as 100 people elsewhere in the county.

Every 10 years, governments must update their legislative districts so that each one contains the same population. Lee County must complete this process by July.

The Illinois courts have given counties the discretion to exclude prison populations during redistricting, according to the Prison Policy Initiative. Most counties with large prisons reject the U.S. Cen-

sus count and apportion political power within their jurisdictions on the basis of residents, not its prison cells, the group says.

In fact, 10 Illinois counties already count residents this way.

County Board Chairman Jim Seeberg said he wouldn't want to exclude the prison population, contending the county would lose \$100,000 in tax revenue a year if it did so. County Treasurer John Fritts agreed with Seeberg's number.

Kajstura said she's heard that argument many times, and it's not correct – government funding is never based on redistricting.

Some government money is distributed based on population, but if a county doesn't include prisoners in redistricting, that would have no effect on the Census numbers.