

7A Opinions

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Free prisoners – from voting data

Rome needs to get rid of its prisoners in the Second Ward – at least on paper. More than two years after a state law passed requiring municipalities to account for prisoners when redrawing legislative lines, nothing has happened. The city is still counting prisoners as population, and while that might work for census purposes, it's wrong to include them when voter representation is determined.

That must change. In 2011, 2,083 of the second ward's roughly 5,000 residents were prisoners in the Oneida and Mohawk correctional facilities. But they do not vote or participate in city affairs.

The 2010 law provided two options: Either remove prisoners from the counts altogether or use new state data that reallocates them to their hometowns. Either option is fair. What's not fair is the status quo. Some believe lower numbers would affect state aid, but Peter Wagner, executive director of the nonprofit Prison Policy Initiative, says that's not so.

Rome is considering redrawing ward lines. It should exclude the prisoners. Putting them in the mix is a grave injustice to taxpaying Romans.