

STAR-GAZETTE

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Inmate count not detrimental

Elmira Mayor John Tonello is concerned that a bill to change how prisoners are counted for redistricting purposes would hurt Elmira's budget. ("Officials: Changing how census counts inmates would hurt region," Feb. 1) This concern is misplaced.

The bill under consideration, S6725, would adjust federal census data for redistricting purposes. It would not apply to any federal or state funding program. All it would do is ensure that the data used for redistricting by the state and in each county complies with the New York State Constitution's definition of residence, which declares that people in prison remain residents of their pre-incarceration addresses.

Ironically, the proposed bill would put New York State's practice in line with that of Chemung County. Rather than draw a county legislative district that was 30 percent prisoners — and give residents near the prison more influence over county affairs — Chemung County decided to adjust the census, ignore the prison population, and draw fair county districts.

Like the proposed bill in the Senate, Chemung's decision to draw fair districts without the prison population had no effect on federal or state funding. But it was a very good thing for democracy.

PETER WAGNER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE
EASTHAMPTON, MASS.