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Why we're about to end prison gerrymandering in Colo.

By **Kerry Tipper**
and **James Coleman**
Guest Commentary

Our bill to end prison gerrymandering in Colorado is just one step from becoming law. This month, the House voted to pass HB 1010, and now the Senate has done the same. If it is signed by the governor, as we expect it to be, this bill will ensure that our state has fair electoral maps, a stronger democracy and a more just political representation.

Prison gerrymandering is the practice of counting incarcerated individuals as residents of the prison cells they have been placed in. There are several important problems here. First, the Colorado Constitution plainly declares that a prison cell is not a residence, meaning that people in prison are not legal constituents of the area where they have been incarcerated. And they're

definitely not treated as such.

While digging into this issue and drafting this bill, we spoke to several elected officials who represented large populations of incarcerated people and asked whether they had ever held a town hall in a correctional facility. No one knew how many inmates were in their district, and only one had ever met with incarcerated individuals in their district.

So how can we improve this system? Our bill would ensure that inmates are, for purposes of state redistricting, counted as residents of their last known address during the census. The result would be that a prisoner's political representation will be tied to the community they are rooted in and not the temporary prison cell where they are serving time. Because the average prisoner in Colorado is incarcerated for three years and the census happens every 10, this is es-

pecially important.

This bill is about fairness, plain and simple. With the 2020 census coming to Colorado in the next month or so, we want to ensure that Colorado has accurate and fair representation in the next decade and beyond. While we certainly set out to do right by the 19,000 or so incarcerated individuals in Colorado, our bill is about much more than just them. More accurate district maps, a fairer count of Coloradans and better population data means a stronger democracy.

This bill will make a difference for everyone who wants to ensure their districts have the most accurate representation possible.

As informed readers will know, census counts are about more than just redistricting and political representation — the distribution of federal funds are tied to census counts. Rest assured, this bill will not affect how state or federal funding is allocated. It

may alter the shape of some legislative districts, but this won't impact funding for any district's infrastructure, public safety or other services.

This is because no funding agency, in any state, ever relies on redistricting data to determine grant amounts. Furthermore, the bill will have a zero-dollar fiscal impact. The Department of Corrections already has the data required by the bill, and the Census Bureau will even aid in correcting the redistricting data.

As we begin this census year and as a nation undertake the massive enterprise of counting each person living here, it is imperative that we do it in the most accurate and just way possible. What's more, Coloradans have already agreed that we want fair district maps — that's why in 2018, more than 60% of voters supported bipartisan Amendments Y and Z, which created

two new independent redistricting commissions.

We're proud that our House and Senate colleagues joined us in passing HB 1010, and we're excited to see Gov. Jared Polis sign it into law. Our state's democracy will be better for it.

Kerry Tipper is the state representative for House District 28, where she represents Lakewood and a small part of Littleton. She sits on the House Judiciary Committee and the House Health and Insurance Committee. James Coleman is the representative for



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