

March 5, 2024

Common Cause MN is a nonpartisan grassroots organization working to create open, honest, and accountable government, more information about our work at www.commoncause.org. Minnesota is home to over 18,000 statewide Common Cause MN multipartisan members and despite belonging to various MN party affiliations, or not being affiliated, the one thing they've come together to do is support our work ensuring our Republic's democracy is safeguarded, and everyone's vote counts.

We are grateful to Rep. Agbaje for introducing HF4043 ending the practice of prison gerrymandering in Minnesota.

Most incarcerated Minnesotans have no ties to the community in which they are incarcerated, and many have no intentions of making it their home upon release. For the census, incarcerated individuals are counted where they are and not their home community. They do not have the right to vote so a district that houses one of our prisons currently has the same number of people as neighboring districts without prisons, while only a percentage of the prison district's population can cast a vote. In effect, Minnesotans voting in a district with a prison, in effect, carries more weight than one cast by someone who lives in a district without a prison, or a district that loses residents due to high rates of incarceration. It's time to end the practice of prison gerrymandering in MN.

We support HF4043. We encourage Rep. Agbaje and committee members to consider the effect of a specific bill provision adding guidance for the geocoding process. In general, that would be a best practice, but the bill as written places limitations on geocoding results that are overly narrow.

The policy implication in effect requires perfection in both the address data, and the mapping software. All states have encountered minor errors and typos in their address data. Allowing some leeway in the geocoding process has produced better reallocation success while still maintaining a high quality of redistricting data.

According to one of our national partners, Aleks Kajstura, Legal Director for Prison Policy Initiative, "Allowing "range_interpolated" or "geometric_center" matches, particularly for polylines would allow for an address to be mapped and reallocated despite minor typographical errors in an address entry, or where street number ranges in the mapping software are out of date or incomplete. A "rooftop" match is not necessary for the level of accuracy needed to draw representative districts. The chances of a range_interpolated or even polygon geometric_center match crossing district lines is very low, and a reasonable level of imprecision when balanced against only counting that person as part of the statewide total."

Thank you for your dedication to all Minnesotans as you work in committee.

Anastacia Belladonna-Carrera
Anastacia Belladonna-Carrera,
Executive Director