

March 10, 2015

To: Oregon Senate Committee on Rules, Sen. Diane Rosenbaum, chair  
From: Steven Carter, AARP Oregon  
Re: Support for Senate Bill 331, counting prisoners for purpose of redistricting

AARP is a national, non-profit, non-partisan organization representing and advising more than 37 million members age 50 and over on matters of health care, financial security, consumer protection, livable communities, government integrity and civic engagement. In Oregon, we have a large membership spread through the state, and many volunteers active on public and social issues.

AARP's Policy Book, which guides the organization's stance on public issues, cites the importance of the one-man, one-vote concept. "Recent Supreme Court decisions on redistricting have supported voter rights by ensuring that districts adhere to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees that every vote have equal weight," quoting the book. The book goes on to say that this trend "should be continued as we move toward systems of redistricting that better represent our communities."

The current practice in Oregon of counting prisoners for purposes of redistricting in the places where they are incarcerated works against the one-man, one-vote concept. Oregon prisoners do not have voting privileges, nor are they the members of the community where the prisons are located. When inmates are counted as residents in their place of incarceration, it gives extra weight to constituents in these political districts and dilutes the voting strength of the locations they lived before being jailed. Oregon law requires prisoners to be returned to their last residential location before incarceration. Their family, friends, history and life experience are in these areas, not where they are jailed.

The current prisoner counting system distorts the one-man, one-vote particularly in areas where there are large prison populations. Senate Bill 331 would correct this problem by requiring prisoners to be counted for redistricting as members of the district they last lived in before incarceration. AARP urges passage of SB311.

Respectfully,

Steven Carter  
Volunteer, Executive Council member  
AARP Oregon