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Inmate counting;
It should be at their home addresses

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State prison inmates can't vote, but they count big-time in the political fight over state legislative districts. Where they're counted - their addresses before incarceration or their places of incarceration - could affect the balance of Democrats and Republicans in Albany.

Inmates should be considered residents of their home communities. It's where they come from and where most return upon release, so it's most fair. It's also what the state constitution dictates. Regardless, they're counted where they're locked up. Why does it matter? Dollars and representation.

Population, as tallied by the census, determines how Washington distributes \$400 billion a year to local governments for things like schools, roads and health care. Legislation proposed in New York wouldn't immediately change those funding formulas, but it should. With 4,588 inmates from Long Island and 27,888 from New York City incarcerated upstate, we're losing out.

But for some elected officials, the issue is personal. As many as seven upstate State Senate districts, most of them represented by Republicans, meet minimum population requirements for a district only because of the people imprisoned there. If the inmates were counted at their home addresses, the upstate districts would be reconfigured - and maybe one or more eliminated.

That would be bad news for those incumbents. But the fate of elected officials isn't what matters most. What does is treating localities fairly and abiding by the constitution. Albany should put an end to this heist of legislative power.