



# Step by Step Guide: How to count incarcerated people at home

*An overview of the steps involved in adjusting state redistricting data to create equitable solutions to prison gerrymandering*

## STEP 1

### Get state prison data from the state's correctional agency

- Work with the state's correctional agency to get data for people incarcerated on Census Day, including: address where person is incarcerated, last known address prior to incarceration, age, race, and Hispanic origin, if available.
  - To anonymize the data, a unique identifier should be assigned to each record.
  - In most cases, the data on race is incomplete or the categories used by the correctional agency do not line up with census categories, and states will have to take a best-fit approach to matching the corrections data to the census data.
  - If the state maintains alternative addresses (address provided at arrest or expected address on release, etc.) those should be included as well.
- Ensure address data is as specific and accurate as possible, including street, city, zip code, and state.

States can start Steps 1 & 2 immediately after Census Day or as soon as address data for people incarcerated on April 1 is obtained from corrections agencies.

## STEP 2

### Geocode individual address data

- Remove all addresses that list another state.
- Geocode all remaining addresses - geocoding can be done using geocoding software (i.e. ESRI, MapMarker) or the Census Bureau's batch geocoder, available to states specifically for this purpose.
  - Some states contract with a vendor to do the geocoding.
  - The geocoding process will likely identify additional addresses in need of correction (problems such as "street" instead of "avenue" that look like a complete and accurate address on first glance but fail to match to a mappable address).
- For any addresses that fail to geocode, establish a protocol for correcting addresses and recording any edits made.
  - In 2011, New York established a set of alphabetical codes to note the source of supplemental information used to clean up addresses.
  - Some corrections will be easy, like misspellings or incorrect abbreviations for cities or street names.
  - Other addresses may take more research such as looking at additional address data provided by the state's corrections agency (i.e. booking address) or looking at maps of municipal boundaries, zip codes, or online mapping sites like Google Maps.

- After corrections are made, run all the corrected addresses through the geocoder again, and repeat this process for as many iterations as practicable.
- States handle unusable addresses differently – some require those individuals be counted where they are incarcerated; others, like California, assign the individual to a randomly determined census block within the smallest geographical area that can be determined from the information provided.
- NOTE: Do not let the perfect be the enemy of good! Every person counted at home is one that is not counted in the wrong place. States should make their best effort to correct and geocode as many of the addresses provided, but no state will get 100% accuracy. As a rough guide, a 70% success rate would be considered a good outcome in most states going through the process for the first time.

### STEP 3

#### **Subtract the relevant prison populations from census blocks where prisons are located**

- Subtract the correctional population reported by the census in the group quarters tables of the redistricting data.
- Some states may require or have discretion to subtract federal prison populations.
- Some states, like Maryland, require that individuals without an address be counted at the facility address. In that case, take any unmatched addresses from Step Two, above, and add those populations back into the census block containing the facility.

### STEP 4

#### **Use adjusted data for redistricting**

- The state will have the data set that best counts incarcerated people at home and minimizes padding of districts with prisons once it completes Steps 1 thru 3: people with geocodable addresses have been counted in their home census blocks; correctional group quarters counts have been subtracted from the census blocks where prisons are located; and people without a last known, unusable or out-of-state address have either been subtracted or placed back in the census block where they are incarcerated, depending on what is permitted or required under state law.



#### **Additional resources:**

- Quick reference chart for state-specific legislation:  
<https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/models/chart.html>
- Quick reference on state options for addressing prison gerrymandering:  
[https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/factsheets/national/state\\_solutions.pdf](https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/factsheets/national/state_solutions.pdf)
- A detailed overview of the reallocation process used by New York and Maryland in 2010:  
<https://www.demos.org/policy-briefs/implementing-reform-how-maryland-new-york-ended-prison-gerrymandering>

**For questions and more information on prison gerrymandering, visit**  
<https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org>

**For questions and more information about redistricting, visit**  
<https://www.commoncause.org/our-work/gerrymandering-and-representation/gerrymandering-redistricting/>