

July 13, 2017

SENATE BILL NO. 587

To the Senate:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Senate Bill No. 587 without my approval.

In contravention of decades-old Census Bureau guidance, this bill would change the way that prisoners incarcerated in State prisons and in federal prisons within the State are counted for purposes of legislative redistricting in New Jersey. Rather than being counted in the district where they are incarcerated, prisoners would be counted either in the district of their last known address in the State, if known, or not at all if their last known address is unknown or outside the State. The Secretary of State would perform these reclassifications, in advance of the redistricting process, based on the residential addresses that prisoners would furnish to the Department of Corrections and equivalent federal agency when they report to prison.

Counting prisoners where they resided at one point in the past, instead of where they live and sleep presently, runs counter to how the federal Census Bureau and the majority of states allocate prisoners in the population. It also makes little sense insofar as prisoners are consuming services and resources at the prison and may have only fleeting, dated, or tenuous ties to their prior residence.

This bill smacks of political opportunism, as evidenced by the party-line votes by which it passed both houses of the Legislature. Despite the alleged social justice benefits of the bill touted by its supporters, I am not persuaded to enact such a marked deviation from the Census Bureau's clear and long-standing guidance on this issue.

Accordingly, I am returning Senate Bill No. 587 without my approval.

[seal]

Respectfully,
/s/ Chris Christie
Governor

Attest:

/s/ Robert L. Garrenger
Acting Chief Counsel to the Governor