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Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission

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December 21, 2022

Leadership of the 68th Montana Legislature
State Capitol
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear President of the Senate Ellsworth, Speaker of the House Regier, Senate Majority Leader Fitzpatrick, Senate Minority Leader Flowers, House Majority Leader Vinton, and House Minority Leader Abbott,

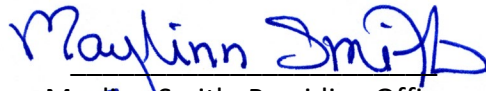
During the course of our constitutionally assigned task of creating congressional and state legislative districts, we encountered two data challenges that can be resolved by our requested legislation for the 68th Legislature. These changes would provide more accurate and usable data for future redistricting commissions and legislatures

Senate Bill 77 creates a process for the Department of Corrections (DOC) to collect the last-known address for each prison inmate prior to incarceration. Using this address information, the Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC) at the Montana Department of Commerce would adjust the decennial census population data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau to place each inmate at that last-known address rather than at the prison in which the inmate was incarcerated on Census Day. The commission received public comment that this reallocation of prisoners is an important policy priority to ensure state legislative lines are drawn with the best possible information. While this commission was able to adjust the Census data to reallocate about half of the state's prisoners, the task was hampered by the lack of complete, accurate data on prisoner addresses. The DOC adjusted its intake process to collect inmate address data, and we want to codify this change. The CEIC staff possess the technical skills needed to adjust the Census data to create a usable dataset, and future commissions would benefit from using the existing state resources on this task rather than hiring a contractor.

Senate Bill 86 limits the populations of election precincts to ensure some additional uniformity. When creating legislative districts, we encountered a wide range of precinct populations, which made creating districts of approximately equal populations challenging. In particular, we found Cascade and Yellowstone Counties each have precincts with sizes that range from more than 5,000 registered voters to less than 500.

We welcome comments and suggestions generated by the legislative process and are willing to work with legislators on necessary amendments to ensure our legislation meets the needs of the state. Please contact any of us with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,


Maylinn Smith, Presiding Officer


Jeff Essmann, Commissioner


Denise Juneau, Commissioner


Dan Stusek, Commissioner


Kendra Miller, Commissioner