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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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Rep. Ford Working to Ensure Prison Inmates Counted in Census at their Last Known Residence

SPRINGFIELD, IL – When the next national census is taken, state Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) wants the state of Illinois to count prisoners at their last known address rather than where they are imprisoned, which would provide lawmakers with more accurate population counts and demographic data and ensure that Illinois residents are receiving fair representation in government.

"This legislation corrects a flaw in the federal census data that counts prisoners at the location of the prison, giving extra representation to districts that contain prisons while diluting the votes of everyone else," Ford said. "We have troubled communities across the state with high rates of incarceration and formerly incarcerated prisoner returning to those areas, with limited to no resources to support the reentry process. The current system weakens those communities that actually are responsible for helping improve the quality of life for the formerly incarcerated."

Ford's House Bill 94 would require state and federal prison authorities in Illinois to report to the Illinois Secretary of State the name, age, gender, race and last pre-incarceration address of each prisoner in custody. The data would then be used to prepare an adjusted population distribution count that removes the prisoner from the residency count of their prison location and adds them to the count of their last known residence location.

After the federal census counts are adjusted, the new counts would be used for redrawing legislative districts for the General Assembly and United States Congress, as required every 10 years. Ford's legislation would take effect for the redistricting process that begins after the 2020 Census.

"Rep. Ford's bill is an important effort to fix a longstanding flaw in the federal Census data," said Peter Wagner, Executive Director of the Prison Policy Initiative and an author of "Importing Constituents: Prisoners and Political Clout in Illinois," which analyzed how prison counts distort democracy in Illinois and its counties. "Already, 10 rural Illinois counties and six cities reject the idea that people who live next to large prisons should have extra influence on county boards and city councils. This bill takes that common sense approach and creates one consistent dataset for redistricting use in every city, every county and statewide."

Ford's legislation has passed the House State Government Administration Committee and now goes before the full House of Representatives for further consideration. For more information, call Ford's constituent service office at (773) 378-5902.

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