

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY
VICTOR DICKSON, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SAFER FOUNDATION
JOINT HEARING WITH SENATE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE**

**Subject Matter On: Illinois Communities and the boundaries of Illinois
Congressional, Legislative and Representative Districts.**

**May 1, 2021
10:30 AM**

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Lightford and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Victor Dickson, and I am President and CEO of the **Safer Foundation (Safer)**. For nearly 50 years, Safer has provided a full spectrum of re-entry and rehabilitation services. Today we are a national leader in supporting the efforts of people with arrest and conviction records to become employed, productive members of the community.

POSITION STATEMENT

Every year over 20,000 inmates are released from state prisons in Illinois. The vast majority of those released return to ten specific communities around the state. Forty percent or more of prisoners released return to Cook County in northeast Illinois. During their incarceration prisoners are unfairly counted in the census of the town where they are imprisoned. This results in hundreds of millions of federal dollars used for social services, healthcare and other critical services going to the towns where the prison is located versus the communities where the residents return.

The majority of those incarcerated in the US were living at or below the federal poverty level prior to their incarceration. Their family income reduced by 22% during their incarceration and they will earn almost 40% less in wages the rest of their lives. The barriers they face because of a criminal conviction locks them into a cycle of recidivism.

The communities where released inmates return desperately need a broad set of supports to help break the cycle of incarceration. This includes basic life supports like food, clothing, toiletries, housing and transportation. To break the cycle of recidivism they also need academic education, substance disorder treatment services, mental health services, financial literacy, computer literacy, access to internet services and computers, vocational credential attainment, job readiness and placement services.

Redistricting now, to ensure the communities with the most returning residents receive the funding needed to help those returning residents with the holistic reentry services will drastically reduce recidivism because these comprehensive services have been proven successful. Reducing recidivism is crime and violence reduction work. Breaking the cycle of incarceration means the individual has not committed a new property or violent crime that results in arrest, reconviction or reincarceration. Even prison communities will benefit financially because the taxpayers bear the burden of over \$150,000 in costs per reconviction and over \$38,000 per inmate in annual incarceration costs. Counting inmates in the community of residency prior to incarceration must be implemented immediately to enable the communities receiving returning residents successfully reenter and break the cycle of incarceration.