

HUDSON

Change in inmate counting practices looms

By Lindsay Suchow
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In the long overdue New York state budget finally passed Tuesday evening, lawmakers included a measure which would mandate that prisoners be counted as residents of the areas they came from — not the jurisdictions in which they are being incarcerated.

The passing of the bill, tailored and lauded by Attorney General hopeful Sen. Eric Schneiderman, D-Manhattan, has officials speculating what this could mean for the city of Hudson both politically and financially — particularly in the Third Ward, where the Hudson Correctional Facility is located.

According to spokesperson Linda Foglia of the state Office of Public Information, the facility currently houses 358 male inmates.

Mayor Rick Scalera had initial concerns over whether the drop in population could result in a decrease of state and federal aid to the area in relation to 2010 U.S. Census figures.

But Fourth Ward Supervisor Bill Hughes said he's been in conversation with Schneiderman's office and was assured that lawmakers were looking to implement the bill solely for political redistricting purposes.

"This should not affect our federal aid share," Hughes said. "That was a big concern of mine, and I conveyed that to the senator's camp."

This put many worries to rest for Scalera, he said.

"As long as we don't lose any funding, it isn't much relevant to the smaller community," Scalera said. "It may have implications in the weighted vote of the respective wards, but that's down the road."

Hughes said the real debate is over an apparent disproportion of actual voting populations versus counted populations in upstate areas, which is where most of the New York's correctional facilities are located. This results in upstate New York receiving an amount of elected officials that does not properly reflect the actual number of people they serve, according to proponents of the bill.

"A lot of the downstate population believes that so many of their residents are being housed upstate ... that it allows us to get more elected officials," Hughes said.

State Senate Democratic Majority Spokesperson Travis Proulx maintains the bill is simply a way of reshaping the way

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lines are drawn in New York state, as well as to encourage cities to focus on bolstering other economic engines like higher education, small business and infrastructure rather than relying on penal institutions to keep their municipalities afloat economically.

"With all due respect to the local representatives of Hudson, I think their focus should be on the taxpayers of Hudson — not the criminals spending two months of their life in Hudson," he said.

Proulx said the bill makes sense due to the short amount of time prisoners normally spend in the municipalities which house these correctional facilities.

"(The bill) is very practical in that when someone commits a crime and they leave to serve their time, they're typically not gone very long — the vast majority who serve time in any penal institution are there for less than a year," Proulx said, which therefore causes their home populations to lose out on their own funding for things like health care and education. "Where people come from and where they serve their time doesn't stay the same every 10 years ... a community may benefit this time from the census, but will be hurt next time."

Alderman Chris Wagoner, D-Third Ward, had an initially negative reaction to the bill, but conceded that there could be bene-

fits to it that will become evident in due time.

"I don't think it's a good thing; I think they should be counted as residents. They live here," Wagoner said. "I feel like it will put a lot of voting power back in New York City, which is where I imagine a lot of the prisoners come from, which I don't think is fair to us. However, there may be some pros to it that I don't know about yet."

Alderwoman Ellen Thurston, D-Third Ward, said the city would already have to do some reexamining of its population in the near future due to the completion of the census. Losing the prison population would simply prompt an even deeper reevaluation, which she doesn't necessarily view as a bad thing.

"It will put more equal weight on the wards — I think it's a good move," Thurston said. "When the new census figures are in, we're going to need to refigure the wards anyway."

However, Thurston did admit she was less than thrilled about the loss of representation.

"I don't think it's going to be positive if we have less influence and therefore less ability to represent our ward," Thurston said.

Wagoner echoed these concerns.

"It could be a loss for us — I'd hate to see the votes go from the Third Ward," he said. "It would not be a great thing for us."