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Richmond flags glitch in 2010 census data

By Will Jones



A glitch in Richmond's latest census numbers has suggested a massive escape from the Richmond City Jail.

City officials said they discovered this week that 2,755 residents were assigned incorrect living locations in the 2010 data released last month by the U.S. Census Bureau.

For example, 1,476 people were reported as living in a median of Oliver Hill Way near the jail when they apparently should have been located within the facility, said Steve Skinner, a spokesman for the Richmond City Council.

Similarly, 354 people were shown as living in a median along West Broad Street near Harrison Street and Virginia Commonwealth University when they should have been placed in a nearby apartment building.

In addition, 72 people were wrongly shown as living among the statues of Confederate icons in the grassy median of Monument Avenue.

Overall, officials have flagged the data for 95 census blocks, most of which incorrectly show people living in roadway medians.

"They really aren't there," Skinner said. "It's a statistical anomaly."

The Census Bureau acknowledges the mistake.

"In every census, we have situations like this that occur where an error is identified in the assignment of population and housing units within a small geographic area," said Michael C. Cook, a spokesman for the federal agency. "We have spoken to the Richmond city officials, and they understand how to work with the data."

He would not say how many localities in Virginia were experiencing similar problems but called it "statistically insignificant."

City officials are adjusting the data to assign the residents to their proper locations. At this point, officials do not believe the city's reported total population of 204,214 or the breakdown of residents by voter district will be changed, Skinner said.

Richmond officials had been on the lookout for data glitches after similar problems were reported last month for Norfolk.

In Henrico County, the Census Bureau reported zero population for a census block that has 12 homes and a total of 151 people living in blocks that represent roadway medians, Director of Planning R. Joseph Emerson Jr. said.

He said county staffers worked last year to correct more than 3,000 addresses for the Census Bureau. "Because we did that upfront work, it's probably cleaner," he said of the data.

Officials in Chesterfield and Hanover said they were unaware of any problems with the data reported for their counties.

Louisa County reported no problems with residents being assigned to roadway medians. But officials have found a discrepancy in the number of residents broken down by voting district as reported by the Census Bureau on its American FactFinder website and in a set of data sent to the county, said Jeremy Camp, director of community development.

Powhatan County has found that its 2010 census data do not reflect changes made in 2006 to some of its voter district boundaries, County Administrator Carolyn Bishop said.

Last month, state officials reported that a programming error had caused the Census Bureau to assign most of the population of the Norfolk Naval Station to an incorrect block in the city. The agency later adjusted the block for 19,279 people.

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