

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 13, 2020

Dr. Steven Dillingham  
Director  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Road  
Suitland, MD 20746

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

As leaders of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) we write to you to express our concerns that there may be a disproportionate undercount of communities of color in the 2020 Census. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already widespread concern that communities of color would be undercounted in the 2020 Census, as they have been in all past decennial censuses. The pandemic has since then added unprecedented barriers to the enumeration of all Americans and early analysis of the response rates of the 2020 Census show that these barriers are disproportionately impacting communities of color and immigrant communities.

These trends are concerning because the results of the 2020 Census have never been more important. Available data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has created both a public health and economic crisis that is disproportionately impacting communities of color. Well-informed political, policy, and business decisions will be critical to helping communities of color recover from the lingering impact of the crisis and ensuring that our communities have the resources they need to build up resiliency against future pandemics. An undercount in the 2020 Census could set our communities back for the decade to come.

Given these concerns, we respectfully request the Census Bureau do the following:

- Host a Member-level telebriefing within the next week on the status of 2020 Census operations for Members of the Congressional Tri-Caucus and Congressional Native American Caucus similar to the one that Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform received on Friday April 24, 2020.
- Host separate Member-level meetings between the Census Bureau Director and each of the aforementioned caucuses.
- Commit to hosting monthly Member-level meetings between the Census Bureau Director and each caucus as we continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and as Congress evaluates providing statutory relief to the Bureau;

- Host a staff telebriefing within the next week on the status of the 2020 Census that is open to all congressional staff.
- Commit to hosting bi-weekly telebriefings to keep all congressional staff routinely informed on changes to census operations, including changes to the field program and communications program, as we continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and as Congress evaluates providing statutory relief to the Bureau;
- Provide written responses to the questions and concerns outlined in letters from the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucus that were sent on April 14<sup>th</sup> and April 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively.

Additionally, we request answers to the following questions by no later than May 22, 2020:

### **Request for Relief from the Statutory Reporting Deadlines**

- The Bureau has stated that delays to data collection operations may affect the Bureau's ability to provide quality data and meet statutorily required dates for delivering data to the President and the states. How will the Bureau ensure quality of data products if not provided statutory relief from the deadlines for reporting apportionment and redistricting data?

### **Congressional Relations**

- How does the Census Bureau plan on ensuring that Congressional offices are aware of changes to the enumeration process while operations are adapted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Field Operations**

- How will an anticipated second wave of COVID-19 cases in the Fall be factored into the Bureau's operational plans for the Census?
- How will the Census Bureau ensure that areas where field operations begin later and are cut short by a second wave of COVID-19 are not disproportionately undercounted?

### **Self-Response and the Communications Program**

- The Bureau extended the self-response period and delayed its Nonresponse Followup operation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. How will the Bureau maximize self-response during delays in field operations?
- Has the Bureau considered additional mailings beyond the planned sixth mailing or extending the period for paid advertising? Will local level extensions be made to either in areas where Nonresponse Followup begins later?
- How will the Census Bureau ensure that information about operational changes to the 2020 Census due to the COVID-19 pandemic are made publicly available in a timely manner?
- The Census Bureau recently announced that it plans to expand the communications program to 40 languages. What languages will be included in this expansion? What forms of media will this expansion apply to and how will this expansion be targeted to

individuals who speak those languages? Will in-language direct mail be a part of this expansion?

### **Nonresponse Follow-up**

- How will the Bureau manage Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) and data quality control activities? Door-to-door visits for NRFU interviewing and quality control activities may be less effective in a post-COVID-19 environment. What, if any, changes to collecting data will be made?
- Is the Census Bureau planning for the possibility that NRFU may not be possible in parts of the country during the enumeration period? If so, how will the Census Bureau ensure a complete count in these areas?

### **Area Census Offices**

- What steps is the Census Bureau taking to support teleworking by its management teams in Area Census Offices (ACOs) during a possible second wave of COVID-19?
- How ready is the Bureau to adapt to circumstances where COVID-19 may be having very different local impacts? The Bureau is likely to experience further disruptions due to the resurgence of COVID-19 when field operations resume. How prepared is the Bureau for further COVID-19 disruptions at ACOs? How will the Bureau adapt schedules, reporting requirements, and performance metrics in areas of the country where COVID-19 resurges? How is the Bureau addressing lease modifications for ACOs and the Regional Census Centers?
- How is the Bureau ensuring that it communicates information about evolving timelines, field protocols, updates to training, and modified operations to ACO staff in timely, clear, and consistent way?

### **Group Quarters and Service Based Enumeration**

- What is the current status of the Group Quarters Enumeration?
- How is the Bureau adjusting plans for Service Based Enumeration? Often those counted through this operation are more transitory. Recall bias, the ability to remember where one was living on April 1, and the ability and infrastructure of facilities to provide data may disproportionately affect individuals enumerated through these methods. How will the Bureau ensure the quality of data collected for those people staying or living in group quarters?

### **Mobile Questionnaire Assistance**

- How is the Bureau adapting its Mobile Questionnaire Assistance (MQA) approach? The MQA initiative was intended to provide staff at community events to help people complete their questionnaire and answer questions in locations with low-self response. With community events widely canceled, the Bureau stated that the operation needs further review and coordination with partners. When can we expect to see a revised plan for MQAs?

## **Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation**

- Misinformation and disinformation spread through traditional media (e.g. newspapers) or social media could impact both the self-response rate and the rate of response through NRFU. What actions is the Bureau taking to monitor, manage, and react to misinformation and disinformation incidents (including those relating to COVID-19 and its impact on the 2020 Census) to ensure that incorrect information does not impact response rates?

## **Hiring and Onboarding of Census Staff**

- The effects of COVID-19 on hiring and retention remains uncertain. How will the Bureau ensure adequate and timely hiring and onboarding and ensure that those hired are reflective of the communities in which they are working?
- Will the Bureau reassess its anticipated workload and staff needs for NRFU? When it resumes operations, will the Bureau be able to hire and onboard more field staff, if needed? Please provide our Members with the Bureau's projected timelines for new hiring and onboarding processes.
- When Census operations resume, the Bureau will face differing state and local public health guidance and policies. What steps has the Bureau taken to ensure the health and safety of Census workers as well as members of the general public? Please share the Bureau's plan for putting into place appropriate protocols and procedures and ensuring the availability of protective equipment and cleaning supplies.
- How will an anticipated second wave of COVID-19 cases be factored into the Bureau's safety plans for its employees?

## **Language Access**

- Aside from expanding the in-language communications program, what additional steps is the Census Bureau taking to ensure that limited English proficient (LEP) individuals are reached while social distancing measures are in place?

## **Partnership Program**

- With the focus on self-response and constraints on face-to-face information sharing and enumeration due to social distancing, the Bureau's National and Community Partnerships are more important than ever. How is the Census Bureau coordinating with National and Community Partners to ensure they are still able to support census efforts, especially considering the adjusted operations and timeline?
- What effort is the Bureau making to coordinate partnership efforts with Area Census Offices post- COVID-19? When operations resume, will there be changes to help ACO staff coordinate with Partnerships Specialists?
- The Census Bureau has indicated that field operations will resume at different points in time across the country. As the Census Bureau makes determinations on when it is appropriate to resume operations, how will these changes be communicated to local

Census Partners? Will Census Partners be informed in advance if field operations are likely to resume later in their area?

### **Census Questionnaire Assistance**

- Adaptations made because of COVID-19 have made it harder to provide in-person language assistance to Limited English Proficient (LEP) respondents. Is the Census Bureau exploring expanding the in-language options at call centers as they work to expand that program? If so, will South Asian languages be included in this expansion?
- The Census Bureau recently announced that it is taking steps to decrease wait times for phone respondents by reinstating the callback option and making more employees available to respond to requests. How much has capacity been increased at call centers, and what is the increase per call center, per language option, and per language per call center?
- If the Census Bureau is utilizing remote operators in its call centers, what has the increase in remote operating capacity been, and how does this increase differ by language option? What is the new average wait-time overall and per language option?

### **Disclosure Avoidance, Evaluation and Post-Enumeration Survey**

- What actions is the Bureau taking to revise plans and schedules related to disclosure avoidance activities? The Bureau had been developing near-term plans for activities related to disclosure avoidance and differential privacy. These activities included gathering additional feedback from data users, convening expert panels, and developing training on differential privacy. Has the Bureau revised the plans and schedules for these activities? How is the Census Bureau ensuring that the differential privacy policy impact protects confidentiality without negatively impacting the availability of useful data for smaller racial and ethnic groups?
- How has the Bureau revised its evaluation program in light of COVID-19? How will the evaluation program consider the impact of COVID-19 on census data collection and quality?
- What actions is the Bureau taking to ensure the reliability of the Post-Enumeration Survey? Less effective door-to-door visits may also affect the reliability of the post-enumeration survey's data and therefore its ability to assess the quality of the count. What, if any, changes will be made to the survey?

### **Enumeration of the Territories**

- What is the current status of the 2020 Census operations in the U.S. Territories including Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands? Please provide a copy of the in-field operations and communications plans originally planned for each of the territories before the COVID-19 outbreak, and updated detailed information on how the Bureau is adjusting its operations and communications plans. We ask that the following information be provided for each of the territories:
  - Detailed adjusted timelines for each operation;

- A breakdown of the local territory governments that the Bureau is working with to coordinate these new plans;
- Updated communications and media plans on how the Bureau plans to communicate these updates to the public, including the languages in which they are being communicated;
- Updated plans on how the Bureau plans to keep census employees in the territories safe;
- Additional information on the Bureau’s plans to restart the Update/Leave Operations in Puerto Rico. We understand that while the Bureau is adjusting its Update/Leave operation state-side, there is still a lack of clarity on next steps for Puerto Rico.
- Additional updates on the operations for the remaining U.S. territories and how they have been affected or adjusted. The four remaining U.S. territories are Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, America Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**Information Technology Systems**

- What actions is the Bureau taking to address IT systems testing and implementation risks resulting from COVID-19 and its new operations schedule? Is there a sufficient number of contractor staff available to perform additional systems testing needed for COVID-19-related changes, such as the purchasing of additional handheld devices?
- What steps is the Bureau taking to assess and implement the IT contract changes needed to support the new operations schedule? Has the Bureau reassessed the time frames for reducing the IT servers, storage capacity, and software licenses supporting 2020 Census operations?

We look forward to continuing to work together on achieving a complete and accurate count in the 2020 Census.

Sincerely,



Judy Chu  
Member of Congress  
CAPAC Chair



Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress  
CHC Chair



Karen Bass  
Member of Congress  
CBC Chair



Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress  
CBC Census 2020 Task Force Chair



Deb Haaland  
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