



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

Joaquin Castro | Chairman

116TH CONGRESS

April 3, 2020

Dr. Steven Dillingham
Director
United States Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

As Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), we write to you today regarding the Census Bureau's plans to ensure a full and accurate count in the 2020 Census in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic. As this public health crisis continues to change the ways in which our country operates, we understand that the Census Bureau is currently evaluating changes to the 2020 Census operational plans, all while ensuring the safety of its workers and the public.

We know the Census Bureau has incorporated years of extensive research, testing, and data into its comprehensive decennial census operation, especially with the Bureau's transition to an online census. While we know the Bureau has emergency and disaster-related contingency plans for the decennial operation, we know that the unprecedented public health crisis requires a recalibration of the Bureau's major operations including Update Leave, Update Enumerate, Mobile Questionnaire Assistance, Group Quarters Enumeration, and Non-Response Follow Up. These are challenging times and we commend the Bureau for prioritizing the health and safety above all in its most recent decision to extend the suspension of in-field operations until at least April 15, 2020.

As members of the CHC, we know that our community has a history of being undercounted and that this public health crisis illuminates the very real peril that a lack of representation and sufficient funding for public health programs presents. According to early research coming from the City University of New York Mapping Service, nationwide self-response rates for the 2020 Census are lagging behind self-response rates for the same time period in the 2010 census.¹ We are concerned about what this means for response rates in Latino communities that were already considered hard-to-count. Over the last year, the CHC has met with yourself and with your senior leadership on a quarterly basis and worked in good faith to identify opportunities to work with the Bureau to ensure an accurate count in the 2020 Census.

As we move forward in these uncertain times, we urge the Bureau to continue operating with this partnership in mind and to keep an open line of communication with CHC offices. We understand the ongoing agility that the

¹ <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Center-for-Urban-Research/CUR-research-initiatives/Census-2020-Response-Rate-Analysis-Week-1>

COVID-19 pandemic requires of all census leaders to ensure our communities participate in the 2020 Census. In that spirit, we urge the Census Bureau to begin providing reoccurring updates with all relevant data and metrics to our offices of the Bureau's evolving plans to ensure our messaging and actions align with the Bureau's most pressing needs. We respectfully request telephonic briefings or online briefings for our staff to ensure everyone's health and safety.

In particular, we urge the Census Bureau to share updates with our offices on the following topics:

1. **Employee Safety.** We understand that the Census Bureau has to balance data quality and logistical concerns against the COVID-19 driven imperative to delay operations that require personal contact.
 - a. Can you please share updates on the extent to which behind-the-scenes Census Bureau operations have continued? Please also share updates on the additional steps that the Bureau is taking to ensure employee safety.
 - b. What is the current operational status of the two census data processing facilities in Jefferson, Indiana and in Tucson, Arizona? What steps is the Bureau taking to ensure employee safety?
 - c. We have also heard that there have been COVID-19 cases reported at call centers, or that there is a concern that they will occur, and for that reason phone response capacity is reduced. In view of the paramount importance of self-response mechanisms like the call centers, what is the Bureau doing to get call centers back up to full speed as soon as possible while also meeting public health guidance?
2. **Hiring.** We understand that the hiring and onboarding processes are currently paused due to the level of in-person interaction that these processes require. We also understand that the Bureau has kept job applications open in case the Bureau needs to hire additional workers in the coming months.
 - a. Can the Census Bureau share more information on where the hiring and onboarding processes stand as of today?
 - b. What percentage of jobs that the Census Bureau originally planned to create have already been filled?
 - c. What is the rate of attrition of people who were hired and trained, but have since resigned from their jobs due to health concerns in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - d. What are the steps that the Bureau is taking to ensure that these pauses are not affecting the long-term response intake process?
 - e. Which additional jobs do you predict you may need to bring on as the Bureau responds to this crisis?
3. **Training.** We understand that the Bureau has paused in-person trainings and shifted to digital trainings. Can you provide an update on this shift to digital training?
 - a. Which jobs exactly have shifted to digital trainings?
 - b. Are all regions of the country experience equal shifts to digital trainings?
 - c. How is the Bureau accounting for communities with low broadband and internet access like New Mexico as it shifts these trainings to digital platforms?
 - d. Have all hires been notified and updated of these changes as of today?
4. **Operations in Hard-to-Count Communities:** What resources or efforts can the Bureau shift to places where self-response rates are the lowest and where the Bureau planned to seek out the most in-person contact (Update/Enumerate and Update/Leave census tracts), to best ensure consistency of effort to get out the count?
 - a. Can the Bureau ensure that new hires are deployed in hard-to-count communities? If so, how?

- b. What metrics is the Bureau using to identify tracts and communities where response rates are falling the farthest behind projections and where intensified efforts are and will be most urgently needed?
 - c. Can the Bureau share any updates on the Mobile Questionnaire Assistance centers? We know these were specifically planned to assist communities with a history of low response rates.
 - i. Who is the Bureau consulting with to reach a final decision on mobile questionnaire assistance centers?
 - ii. If these centers are suspended indefinitely, how will the Bureau deploy the funding appropriated by Congress specifically for these centers? Will the Bureau commit to consulting Members of Congress before reaching a final decision with regards to Mobile Questionnaire Assistance Centers?
 - d. Further, we understand that Puerto Rico was supposed to be a 100-percent Update Leave Operation because of previous natural disasters and a lack of clarity about which addresses were still occupied. Please share with our caucus how far along in the Update Leave Operation the Census Bureau got before pausing due to COVID-19 precautions? Please share all pertinent data on how COVID-19 is affecting the response rate in Puerto Rico, if at all, and what the Census Bureau's plans are to address this?
5. **Community Partners.** How is the Census Bureau effectively coordinating with its community partners across the country and in our congressional districts to ensure aligned messaging and outreach efforts?
- a. Is the Census Bureau holding regular updates for its community partners?
6. **Communications Plan.** We understand that the Bureau is in the middle of shifting its communications plan to align with new messaging that is mindful of COVID-19. Can the Bureau provide an update on when we can expect this new communications plan?
- a. What percentage of the Bureau's messaging plan will be in Spanish? And in which media markets? Will previous allocations change in response to the national emergency?
 - b. Which trusted Spanish media outlets and networks is the Bureau working with to ensure that Hispanic and Latino communities receive this message?
 - c. How is or isn't the Bureau incorporating stay-at-home orders across different states into its decision-making for its new communications plan?
 - d. How is the Bureau making sure that individuals in historically hard to count communities that may be under a stay-at-home order and have low access to broadband are being communicated to on how to complete the 2020 Census?
 - e. Will the Bureau work with local and state elected officials to obtain special permission, as needed, to conduct any enumeration efforts that are consistent with social distancing guidelines, but may go beyond the bounds of allowed activities under stay-at-home orders?
7. **Census Timeline.** Can you confirm whether the Bureau still anticipates delivering a count to the Office of the President by December 31, 2020?
- a. Can you confirm where the Bureau stands on extending the census data tabulation period?
 - b. If the Bureau believes in keeping the current time frame for the data tabulation period, can the Bureau please share any experientially based projections of how data accuracy degrades in relation to time elapsed since Census Day on April 1, 2020.
8. **Census Bureau Funding.** Is the Bureau still adequately funded to deliver on its constitutional mandate given the challenges presented by COVID-19? We urge the Bureau to provide our offices with continuous updates on the amount of contingency funds spent or projected to be spent so we can adjust Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations in accordance.

- a. To date, has the Bureau started using its contingency funds? If so, where are these contingency funds being allocated? What portion, if any, has gone directly to equipment to ensure the health and safety of Census Bureau employees?
- b. As we continue to amplify the ability to self-respond, can or has the Bureau used contingency funding to set up a system that would allow operators to take calls over the internet from any remote locations in light of health concerns?

As the Census Bureau continues to evaluate next steps, we urge you to work with us and other Members of Congress to reach well-informed and widely accepted decisions, specifically with regards to timeline changes and adjustments. We look forward to continuing working together to ensure an accurate and complete count of our communities in the 2020 Census.

We appreciate your time to review these questions and look forward to receiving your responses by April 10, 2020.

Sincerely,

Joaquin Castro
CHC Chair

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CHC First Vice Chair

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CHC Second Vice Chair

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