

March 21, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are leaders of some of our nation's largest and oldest nonpartisan philanthropic institutions giving hundreds of millions of dollars each year to advance the common good and improve quality of life in the United States. We have different funding priorities, are ideologically diverse, and do not always agree with each other. However, we have come together to support the Census Bureau's efforts to achieve a fair and accurate census.

We share a commitment to reliable and accurate data as a necessary foundation for a well-functioning government, robust civil society, and thriving business sector in the United States. With these shared interests in mind, we write to raise our profound concerns about adding a new question regarding citizenship status to the 2020 Census questionnaire. Adding such a question would undermine the accuracy of 2020 Census data.

Despite the Census Bureau's best efforts, recent decennial censuses have resulted in net undercounts of many communities, with consequences for drawing political boundaries, disbursing roughly \$700 billion in federal funds annually, and facilitating business and economic development. Adding a citizenship question without sufficient testing further jeopardizes the quality of the upcoming census. What the Bureau learned when researching respondent confidentiality concerns is troubling enough to warrant substantial testing of such a question. A September 20, 2017 Census Bureau memo from the Center for Survey Management noted that "fears, particularly among immigrant respondents, have increased markedly this year." That memo further stated, "These findings are particularly troubling given that they impact hard-to-count populations disproportionately, and have implications for data quality and nonresponse." Similarly, previous Census Bureau directors have noted that adding a citizenship question without necessary testing endangers the quality of all census data, because it could discourage census participation among the tens of millions of households with non-citizen members as well as have unknown impacts on other populations.

The 2020 Census is so near that the once-a-decade end-to-end test arguably represents the last reasonable chance to have tested a substantial revision to the questionnaire. That test is well underway in Providence, Rhode Island without the citizenship question being asked. Other tests, including of non-traditional addresses and languages other than English, were previously canceled due to funding limitations and uncertainty. Long-time census experts and observers are unified in their belief that the decennial census has been and continues to be underfunded. As a result, it does not seem possible that the Census Bureau could conduct a high-quality test to learn how and to what extent a new citizenship question could undermine the quality of 2020 Census data.

Our institutions have appreciated a strong working relationship with Census Bureau staff, in some cases stretching back decades. We have previously supported and are again supporting research, education, outreach, and other efforts to help the Bureau fulfill its goal of counting

everyone once, only once, and in the right place. Adding a citizenship question at this late date seriously threatens any chance of achieving that goal.

As it is, the Census Bureau faces daunting challenges to fulfill its constitutional obligation to produce an accurate decennial census in 2020. Funding shortfalls, the need to develop new and unprecedented data and information infrastructure, and the lack of a Senate-confirmed director for this first high-tech census already raise worries about the Bureau's ability to produce a reliable and accurate count. Now is not the time to add a new, untested citizenship question.

We would be pleased to meet with you should you like more information about our philanthropic efforts to support an accurate census or discuss the citizenship question. We thank you for your consideration of these concerns, and for your leadership on the census.

Sincerely,

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