



December 7, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee

Re: Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriation for Fiscal Year 2019
Bureau of the Census: Questionnaire Assistance Centers for the 2020 Census

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I write to respectfully request adequate funding for the 2020 Census in the fiscal year 2019 Commerce–Justice–Science (CJS) appropriations bill.¹ In particular, we request that appropriators provide at least \$32.9 million in additional funding for Questionnaire Assistance Centers in the 2020 Census.²

The Senate Appropriations Committee has previously called for the Census Bureau to “work with libraries . . . as part of the overall strategy to maximize survey response” for the 2020 Census.³ Funding Questionnaire Assistance Centers is an essential step to enable the Census Bureau to meet this objective.

Census experts have raised concerns that current funding levels will result in a field operation that is inadequate to assist residents in completing their Census questionnaires. In the absence of an effective field presence by the Census Bureau, we expect that many people will turn to their local public library for information and assistance. While libraries seek to support their communities in achieving a complete count, a well-meaning librarian is not a substitute for a well-trained Census Bureau staff person.

To bridge this gap, ALA encourages appropriators to provide funding for the Census Bureau to establish temporary Questionnaire Assistance Centers in public places across the country, including libraries and other convenient community locations. In the 2010 Census, Questionnaire Assistance Centers enumerated more than 760,000 residents, equivalent to adding an entire Congressional district to the U.S. population.⁴

With the 2020 Census offering, for the first time, an Internet self-response option, there will undoubtedly be many residents who encounter questions or challenges completing their Census form online. Questionnaire Assistance Centers would provide a friendly face in local communities to help everyone get counted. Libraries hosted more than 6,000 Questionnaire Assistance Centers in the 2010 Census, and we believe they are ready to do so again, if Congress funds the program.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me at gbaker@alawash.org or (202) 628-8410. To learn more about the ways that libraries will support a complete count in the 2020 Census, please visit <https://bit.ly/CountOnLibraries>.

Sincerely,



Gavin R. Baker
Assistant Director of Government Relations
American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all.

¹ ALA joins Census stakeholders in requesting at least \$4.456 billion overall for the Census Bureau in FY 2019, which includes at least \$32.9 million for Questionnaire Assistance Centers. See letter from the Census Project, et al., to Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey (Nov. 28, 2018), available at <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/cplettertohouseandsenaterfy2019census11-28-18.pdf>.

² The committee marks of H.R. 5952 and S. 3072 do not include funding identified for Questionnaire Assistance Centers. Stakeholders believe that additional funding is necessary to enable a Questionnaire Assistance Center program for the 2020 Census and are requesting at least \$32.9 million above the committee marks for Questionnaire Assistance Centers. \$32.9 million is the inflation-adjusted level of funding that was provided for the program in the 2010 Census.

³ S. Rept. 115-275 (2018), at 17.

⁴ Geoff Jackson, Keith Wechter, and Susanna Winder, "2010 Census Be Counted and Questionnaire Assistance Centers Assessment," U.S. Census Bureau (May 22, 2012), at xvi, available at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2010/program-management/5-review/cpex/2010-memo-194.pdf>.