

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 9, 2019

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Shaheen:

As you consider appropriations for fiscal year (FY) 2020, we are writing to respectfully request that you include bill language to ensure a full, fair, and accurate 2020 Census by limiting funding to questions that were included in the 2018 End-to-End Test in Providence, Rhode Island. It is imperative that the questions to be included in the upcoming decennial census are limited to the questions that have been adequately tested and evaluated. This will allow the Census Bureau to conduct the decennial census in the most cost-effective way possible.

The 2020 Census is fast approaching. Under the U.S. Constitution, a census conducted every ten years will include the “whole number of persons in each State,” and every decennial census since the first in 1790 counted both citizens and non-citizens alike. This undertaking is this nation’s largest peacetime mobilization, reaching every household and living quarters in the country. The decennial census provides crucial data to inform decision-making at all levels of government and in the private sector. The federal government allocates over \$800 billion annually in program funds based on census or census-derived data. And importantly, census data determine congressional apportionment and guide redistricting at the federal, state, and local levels.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross has consistently emphasized the importance of an “efficient 2020 Census that provides a full, fair, and accurate count of everyone living in this country.”¹ Attempts to make last-minute changes, such as the Department of Justice’s request to include a citizenship question in the 2020 Census, without the necessary and proper research, studies, and tests, could impact the success of a decennial census already constrained by budget shortfalls.

The Census Bureau must already respond to growing reluctance of the public to answer *any* decennial census survey questions due to a distrust in the government. In recent surveys, the agency found concerns about data confidentiality and potential misuse of data to bring harm to their family members or themselves. Survey takers observed “unusual respondent behaviors” in immigrant communities, with fears regarding “[l]egal residency status, fear of deportation, concern about how the data are used, and which agencies can see it.”² Bureau researchers noted

¹ <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/2020-census-examining-cost-overruns-information-security-and-accuracy>

² <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2017-11/Meyers-NAC-Confidentiality-Presentation.pdf>

that these concerns “[c]ould impact data quality and coverage,” and are “[p]articularly troubling because of their disproportionate impact on hard-to-count populations.” More specifically, a 2018 report commissioned by the Census Bureau indicated that a last-minute, untested citizenship question “may be a major barrier” to participation, with respondents citing a distrust in the federal government’s commitment to maintaining the confidentiality of census data.³

In addition, the Commerce Department’s revised life-cycle cost estimate for the 2020 Census assumes a lower self-response than was initially estimated, which would require a larger temporary workforce for door-to-door visits and expanded advertising and partnership efforts. Any untested, controversial changes to the questionnaire could further reduce self-response rates, driving up the cost of the census at a time when Congress has directed the Census Bureau to spend less.

We therefore ask that you include the following bill language:

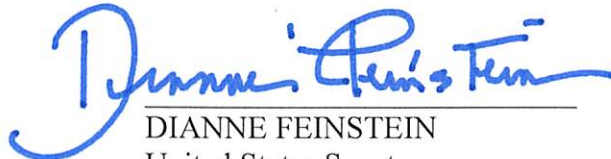
Sec. __. None of the funds made available under this Act may be used by the Secretary of Commerce to incorporate into the 2020 decennial census any question that was not included in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test in Providence County, Rhode Island.

It is imperative that we ensure that the 2020 Census is full, fair, and accurate. Thank you for considering our request.

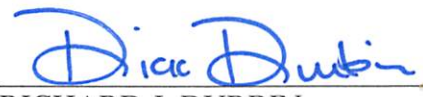
Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator



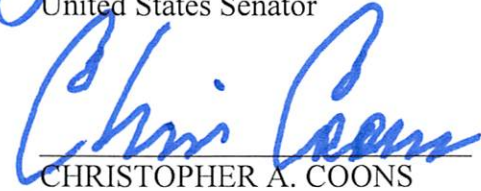
RICHARD J. DURBIN
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United States Senator




TOM UDALL
United States Senator



CHRISTOPHER A. COONS
United States Senator

³ U.S. Census Bureau, “2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study (CBAMS) Survey and Focus Groups: Key Findings for Creative Strategy,” 31 Oct. 2018, <https://apps.npr.org/documents/document.html?id=5026590-Oct-31-2018-Slide-Deck-On-2020-Census-Barriers>.


TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator


CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senator

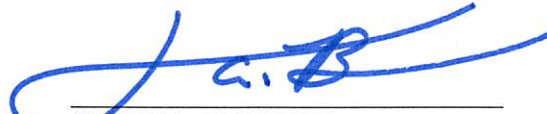

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator

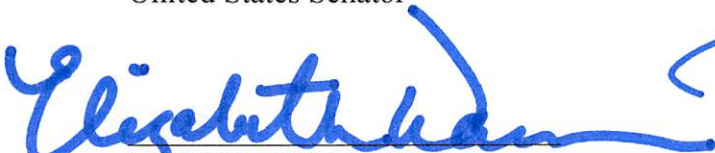

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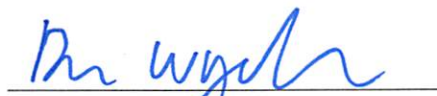

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