

# United States Senate

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As you work on the next legislative package to respond to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we strongly encourage you to provide additional funding for the Census Bureau's Periodic Surveys and Programs. These funds should be used specifically to address the operational changes to the 2020 Census in response to the current public health crisis.

The 2020 Census has already begun. Nearly half of all U.S. households have self-responded, mostly due to the availability of internet and phone responses. However, there will be a portion of the population that may not be able to self-respond for a number of reasons, including a lack of internet or phone access, homelessness, mistrust, etc. It is even more important that during the COVID-19 pandemic, these hard-to-count communities are targeted and receive effective outreach that is both safe and complies with guidance from public health experts.

At the same time, U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham announced that the Census Bureau will delay the start of field operations to June 1, 2020, and extend self-response and field data collection to October 31, 2020. As a result, Secretary Ross and Director Dillingham are requesting that Congress change the statutory deadline for apportionment counts to be delivered to the president and for redistricting data to be delivered to the states by 120 days. The Census Bureau has indicated that it will be unable to meet the current statutory deadlines if the count is extended to October 31.

As the Congress considers this request, it must be paired with additional funding for the Census Bureau to ensure that every person is counted. The extension is expected to cost an estimated \$1.5 billion. The next COVID-19 legislative package should also include language directing the Census Bureau to modify its field operation and communications plan to keep both field workers and the public safe while conducting this constitutionally required enumeration.

These funds should be used specifically on:

- Personal protective equipment for census field workers, call center staff, and other employees;
- Additional mailings to households that have not self-responded;
- Targeted outreach to hard-to-count communities;
- Targeted outreach to the location of the 2018 End-to-End Census Test;
- Special operations to hand-deliver census packets in rural and remote communities, on American Indian reservations, in areas recovering from natural disasters, in Alaska, and in Puerto Rico;
- Enumerating people experiencing homelessness;
- Increased in-language outreach and assistance to supplement 2020 Census partners in non-English speaking communities;
- Changes in Census Bureau's communications plan, including advertisement and social media;
- An increase in the number of call center staff to address higher volumes of self-responses by phone; and
- Facilitating internet access in low self-response neighborhoods.

As the Census Bureau delays field operations and extends the enumeration period, the agency must do more to ensure that every person is counted once, only once, and in the right place. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Mazie Hirono  
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator