

August 6, 2018

Ms. Jennifer Jessup  
Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer  
Department of Commerce, Room 6616  
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Washington, DC 20230

RE: *Proposed Information Collection; Comment Request; 2010 Census* 83 Fed. Reg. 26,643 (June 8, 2018), Docket No. USBC-2018-0005.

The City of Chicago, together with the States of Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington; the Commonwealths of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Cities of Central Falls, Columbus, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Providence, and Seattle; the City and County of San Francisco; the Counties of Cameron, El Paso, Hidalgo, and Monterey; and the United States Conference of Mayors (the “Stakeholders”) submit this comment in response to the Census Bureau’s Federal Register notice regarding the 2020 Census. U.S. Census Bureau, *Proposed Information Collection; Comment Request; 2020 Census*, 83 Fed. Reg. 26,643 (June 8, 2018).

Stakeholders are plaintiffs in litigation currently pending in federal court in the Southern District of New York (the “Court”) against the Commerce Department, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross (the “Secretary”), the Census Bureau (the “Bureau”), and Acting Director of the Census Bureau Ron Jarmin. *See New York v. United States Dep’t of Commerce*, Case No. 18-CV-2921 (JMF) (S.D.N.Y. 2018). The lawsuit challenges the Bureau’s decision to demand citizenship status information from respondents on the 2020 Census.

The Bureau’s decision to collect citizenship information on the 2020 Census through the addition of a citizenship demand fails to meet the requirements federal agencies must satisfy under the Paperwork Reduction Act before conducting any proposed collection of information.

Specifically, the Paperwork Reduction Act requires the Bureau to solicit comment on: (i) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (ii) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of – and ways to minimize – the burden of the proposed collection of information; and (iii) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected. 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(2)(A). The Bureau does not need citizenship information to properly perform its function, as the primary function of the census is to count all persons in the United States without regard to citizenship. Nor will the citizenship demand have practical utility; to the contrary, its deterrent effect on participation among immigrant communities will reduce response rates and negatively impact the accuracy of the census. Furthermore, the Bureau has failed to account for the extra burden the citizenship demand places on respondents and Stakeholders. Finally, the Bureau has not performed any – much less

adequate – testing of the citizenship demand to ensure the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected. Accordingly, because the citizenship demand undermines the quality, usefulness, and accuracy of the 2020 Census, its inclusion is inconsistent with the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act.

### ***I. The Bureau’s Essential Function is to Count All Persons***

The Constitution requires that all persons in each State be counted every ten years; the decennial census is the fulfillment of this constitutional obligation. U.S. Const. art. I, § 2, cl. 3; *id.* amend. XIV, § 2. The primary purpose of this constitutional mandate is to get an “actual Enumeration” of the U.S. population to apportion the U.S. House of Representatives. *Id.* All persons residing in the United States must be counted, regardless of citizenship status. *Fed’n for Am. Immigration Reform v. Klutznick*, 486 F. Supp. 564, 576 (D.D.C. 1980) (three-judge court).

Accurate census data is vitally important to our democracy. The data is used to apportion representatives in the U.S. Congress, as well as to determine representation and districting at the state and local levels. The data is also used, at least in part, to determine appropriations of hundreds of billions of dollars of federal funding for States and municipalities. These appropriations include funding for infrastructure needs such as the Highway Trust Fund program, the Urbanized Area Formula Funding program, the Metropolitan Planning program, and the Community Highway Safety program; public education grants, including those for special education and breakfast and lunch programs; and critical social services, including Medicaid, the Child Care and Development fund, and the Community Development Block Grant program, which provides funding for housing, neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and community facilities. Stakeholders rely on these funds for crucial infrastructure and education services, as well as to provide social services and aid to deserving and needy communities. A reduction in funding caused by an inaccurate census count will almost certainly result in reduced spending and services, and everyone in Stakeholders’ jurisdictions will suffer.

Historically, an accurate count of minority and immigrant populations has been harder to achieve than other demographic groups due to a variety of factors, including language barriers, non-traditional housing arrangements, and concerns over confidentiality. Stakeholders represent areas with some of the largest minority and immigrant populations in the country. Thus, we will be disproportionately affected by a census undercount, potentially reducing the number of congressional representatives and allocation of federal funding for infrastructure and public education, health, and housing for the next decade. As important, undercounted minority and immigrant populations would lose federal aid that directly supports social services in their communities, and become further disenfranchised from fair representation through a dilution of voting power. For these reasons, the census must be designed to ensure the most accurate count of all persons.

### ***II. The Citizenship Demand Will Seriously Impair the Accuracy of the Census***

For decades, the Bureau has taken the position, based on research and collective experience, that gathering citizenship information on the census would further reduce response

rates from already undercounted immigrant and minority populations. The Bureau opposed an effort to demand immigration status on the 1980 Census, explaining that “any effort to ascertain citizenship will inevitably jeopardize the overall accuracy of the population count” because “[q]uestions as to citizenship are particularly sensitive in minority communities and would inevitably trigger hostility, resentment and refusal to cooperate.” *Fed’n for Am. Immigration Reform*, 486 F. Supp. at 568. The Bureau repeated these concerns in 1988 and 1989, in congressional testimony opposing proposed legislation to exclude from the census count any immigrant who was not a lawful permanent resident. *See Census Equity Act: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Census & Population of the H. Comm. on Post Office & Civ. Serv.*, 101st Cong. 43-45 (1989); *Exclude Undocumented Residents from Census Counts Used for Apportionment: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Census & Population of the H. Comm. on Post Office & Civ. Serv.*, 100th Cong. 50-51 (1988).

The Bureau rejected another congressional proposal to add a citizenship question on the 2000 Census, with the then-Director testifying that such a question “would lead to a less complete and less accurate census,” because “[a] significant number of noncitizens will not respond.” *Counting the Vote: Should Only U.S. Citizens Be Included in Apportioning Our Elected Representatives?: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Federalism & the Census of the H. Comm. On Gov’t Reform*, 109th Cong. 73 (2005). Eight former Bureau Directors testified against a congressional proposal to collect citizenship and immigration information on the 2010 Census. *See Statement of Former Census Directors on Adding A New Question to the 2010 Census* (Oct. 16, 2009), [http://reformimmigrationforamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/thecensusproject.org\\_letters\\_cp-formerdirs-16oct2009.pdf](http://reformimmigrationforamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/thecensusproject.org_letters_cp-formerdirs-16oct2009.pdf). And in 2016, four former Bureau Directors filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court explaining that a citizenship demand would lead to lower response rates and “seriously frustrate the Census Bureau’s ability to conduct the only count the Constitution expressly requires: determining the whole number of persons in order to apportion House seats among the states.” Brief of Former Directors of the U.S. Census Bureau as Amici Curiae Supporting Appellees at 25, *Evenwel v. Abbott*, 136 S. Ct. 1120 (2016) (No. 14-940).

More recently, in focus-group testing conducted by the Bureau in 2017, researchers found that sentiments of distrust and fear among immigrant populations “have increased markedly this year,” and people were “intentionally provid[ing] incomplete or incorrect information about household members due to concerns regarding confidentiality, particularly relating to perceived negative attitudes towards immigrants.” Memorandum from the U.S. Census Bureau, Ctr. For Survey Measurement to Assoc. Directorate for Research and Methodology, *Respondent Confidentiality Concerns* (Sept. 20, 2017), <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2017-11/Memo-Regarding-Respondent-Confidentiality-Concerns.pdf>. Researchers reported respondents were expressing “new concerns” about the Trump Administration’s “Muslim ban,” the dissolution of the “DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival) program, [and] repeated references to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.” *Id.* at 2. Spanish-speaking respondents mentioned “being afraid because of the current political climate” and “changing immigration policy,” stating that, as a result, “the Latino community will not sign up because they will think that Census will pass their information on and people can come looking for them.” *Id.* The Bureau concluded that these findings were “particularly troubling given that they impact hard-to-

count populations disproportionately, and have implications for data quality and nonresponse.” *Id.* at 7. The addition of the citizenship demand will greatly exacerbate this fear and mistrust and drive down response rates even further.

Based in part upon this recent and historical research, the Bureau’s own Chief Scientist, Dr. John Abowd, recommended against adding the citizenship demand, concluding that it would not only be “very costly,” but “also harm[] the quality of the census count.” Memorandum of John M. Abowd, Chief Scientist and Associate Director for Research and Methodology, for Wilbur L. Ross, Jr. (Jan. 19, 2018) at 2 (“Abowd Memo”); *see also id.* at 4 (citizenship demand would have “an adverse impact on self-response and, as a result, on the accuracy and quality of the 2020 Census.”). Acting Director Jarmin also acknowledged the negative impact, telling a congressional committee in April of this year that adding the citizenship demand would likely have an “important” impact on response rates that “would be largely felt in various sub-groups, in immigrant populations, [and] Hispanic populations.” *H. Appropriations Comm., Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcomm. Hearing on Bureau of the Census*, 115th Cong. 20 (April 18, 2018). Even the Secretary acknowledged that a problem with “adding questions [to the census] is it reduces response rates.” *H. Oversight and Gov’t Reform Comm. Hearing on 2020 Census*, 115th Cong. (Oct. 12, 2017).

All modern efforts to include a citizenship demand have been rejected for precisely these reasons. As discussed below, the Secretary’s decision to include the citizenship demand abruptly reverses almost 70 years of practice without a valid explanation, and recklessly disregards the official opinions and recommendations of his own Census Bureau, as well as those of countless other experts and stakeholders. Moreover, the Secretary cannot defend the citizenship demand by claiming that the Bureau already seeks citizenship information on the American Community Survey (“ACS”), a questionnaire sent to only 1 in 38 households annually. The ACS was designed for the sole purpose of collecting more detailed demographic data from a sample of the population – not an actual Enumeration for apportionment purposes – and thus cannot be compared to a person-by-person citizenship demand.

The citizenship demand is not only unnecessary to the proper performance of the functions of the agency, it actively undermines those functions – which are to ensure an accurate count of all persons in the United States – and thus has no practical utility. *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(2)(A)(i).

### ***III. Citizenship Information is Not Necessary for the Essential Function of the Bureau***

As explained, the Bureau does not need to collect citizenship information to satisfy its constitutional duty to count all persons in the United States. Admitting this, the Secretary claims instead that he included the citizenship demand at the behest of the Department of Justice, in order to aid enforcement of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. *See* Memorandum from Ross to Under Sec’y of Commerce for Econ. Affairs Karen Dunn Kelley, *Reinstatement of a Citizenship Question on the 2020 Decennial Census Questionnaire* at 1 (Mar. 26, 2018), [https://www.commerce.gov/sites/commerce.gov/files/2018-03-26\\_2.pdf](https://www.commerce.gov/sites/commerce.gov/files/2018-03-26_2.pdf) (“Ross Memo”). DOJ contends that it needs a “reliable calculation of citizen voting-age population in order to determine whether a minority group can constitute a majority in a single-member district,” in

order to protect against the dilution of minority population votes. Letter from Arthur E. Gary, General Counsel, Justice Management Division, U.S. Dep't of Justice, to Ron Jarmin, Performing the Non-Exclusive Functions and Duties of the Director, U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Dep't of Commerce at 2 (Dec. 12, 2017).

The Secretary's position that he relied on DOJ's request to include the citizenship demand appears to be pretextual. Between January 2018 and June 21, 2018, the Secretary repeatedly represented, both in writing and sworn testimony to Congress, that he only began considering the addition of the citizenship demand after DOJ requested it. *See* Ross Memo at 1 (receipt of DOJ request prompted Secretary to "immediately initiate[]" review of issue); *Hearing on Recent Trade Actions, Including Section 232 Determinations on Steel & Aluminum: Hearing Before the H. Ways & Means Comm.*, 115th Cong. 24 (Mar. 22, 2018) (testimony of Secretary Ross), 2018 WLNR 8951469 ("The Department of Justice, as you know, initiated the request for inclusion of the citizenship question."); *S. Appropriations Comm., Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcomm. Hearing on the F.Y. 2019 Funding Request for the Commerce Department*, 115 Cong. 16 (May 10, 2018) (testimony of Secretary Ross), 2018 WL 2179074 at \*27 ("The Justice Department is the one who made the request of us."). It now appears that the Secretary misled Congress. On June 21, 2018, the Secretary produced a memorandum in Stakeholders' litigation stating that "soon after" his appointment in February 2017, he "began considering" whether to add a citizenship demand, an issue that had already been "previously raised" by "senior Administration officials." Supplemental Memorandum by Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross Regarding the Administrative Record in Census Litigation (June 21, 2018). He then asked DOJ "whether it would support, and if so would request, inclusion of a citizenship question as consistent with and useful for enforcement of the Voting Rights Act." *Id.* Indeed, the Court in Stakeholders' litigation concluded that these contradictory statements evidenced "bad faith or improper behavior" on the part of the Secretary, and ordered the Commerce Department to complete the administrative record filed with the lawsuit. *See New York v. Dep't of Comm.*, Case No. 18-CV-2921, Hearing Trans. at 82 (July 3, 2018). The Court also permitted Stakeholders to seek additional discovery to investigate whether the Secretary's purported rationale – DOJ's Voting Rights Act enforcement – was pretext. *Id.* at 82-84.

Pursuant to the Court's order that the Department complete its administrative record in the litigation, the Department produced additional materials on July 23 and July 26, 2018, and new documents further support a finding of pretext. For example, in a May 2, 2017, email to Earl Comstock, the Department's Director of the Office of Policy and Strategic Planning, the Secretary wrote: "I am mystified why nothing have [sic] been done in response to my months old request that we include the citizenship question. Why not?" Ross Email to Comstock (May 2, 2017). The Director responded: "We need to work with Justice to get them to request that citizenship be added back as a census question, and we have the court cases to illustrate that DoJ has a legitimate need for the question to be included." Comstock Email to Ross (May 2, 2017).

These documents appear to show that the Secretary manufactured a justification for the citizenship demand and thereafter solicited DOJ to advance the justification. Indeed, in the July 26, 2018 Opinion and Order largely denying the defendants' motion to dismiss, the Court found that the documents "suggest that Secretary Ross's sole proffered rationale for the decision, that the citizenship question is necessary for litigation of Voting Rights Act claims, may have been

pretextual.” *New York v. Dep’t of Comm.*, Case No. 18-cv-2921, July 26, 2018 Opinion & Order at 63. The Court also allowed claims of discrimination to go forward, finding that there were credible allegations that the citizenship demand was added with discriminatory intent, to target and disenfranchise minority and immigrant communities. *Id.* at 60-67. This finding was bolstered by anti-immigrant comments from President Trump himself, whose re-election campaign claimed that the President “officially mandated” the citizenship demand. *Id.* at 66-67.

Furthermore, DOJ’s proffered reason is suspect. Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965, after any citizenship questions had been removed from the decennial census. Thus, Congress could not have intended that enforcement of Section 2 of Voting Rights Act would rely on citizenship information from the decennial census. And because census information is gathered only every ten years, citizenship information from the decennial census – even if accurately collected – would become outdated and unreliable for voting enforcement purposes. For this reason (among others), the Court in Stakeholders’ litigation expressed skepticism about the defendants’ justification for the demand. *See* July 3, 2018 Hearing Trans. at 83-84 (“To my knowledge, the Department of Justice and civil rights groups have never, in 53 years of enforcing Section 2, suggested that citizenship data collected as part of the decennial census, data that is by definition quickly out of date, would be helpful let alone necessary to litigating such claims.”). DOJ already relies on information gathered on the ACS, which provides more current information. Finally, a person-by-person citizenship demand will actually run counter to the goals of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, as the decreased response rate from minority and immigrant populations will correspondingly decrease their representation in government.

Even if DOJ has a legitimate need for the data, adding a citizenship demand is not the best way to collect it. Dr. Abowd evaluated three different options for responding to DOJ’s request: (A) no change in census data collection; (B) adding the citizenship demand to the questionnaire; and (C) obtaining citizenship status from administrative records. Abowd Memo at 1. After a thorough analysis, he recommended either option A or C – and *not* B – finding that both A and C provided superior means of addressing DOJ’s needs while minimizing damage to the quality and accuracy of the census as well as reducing overall costs. *Id.*

Finally, the paramount constitutional duty of the decennial census is to achieve an actual Enumeration. Thus, even though the census has been used historically to collect secondary demographic information, such collection should not interfere with the census’s primary goal of counting all persons. Yet the citizenship demand will do just that. In fact, the Secretary determined that, even if there is some impact on response rates, “the value of more complete accurate [citizenship] data . . . outweighs such concerns.” Ross Memo at 7. Even assuming enforcement of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act was the Department’s actual reason for adding the citizenship demand – which the evidence makes clear it was not – elevating that objective above the central goal of the census will impermissibly impair the ability of the census to perform its constitutional function. *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(2)(A)(i).

#### ***IV. The Bureau Has Not Accurately Identified the Burden on Respondents***

The citizenship demand will significantly increase the burden on census respondents and

state and local governments, including Stakeholders. The Bureau's Federal Register notice does not take this increased burden into account. *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(2)(A)(ii).

The Bureau identifies two areas of respondent burden in its data collection: (i) contacts made to respondents during its address-canvassing operations; and (ii) direct contact with individual households for enumeration. *See* at 83 Fed. Reg. at 26,651. Yet, in its calculation of these efforts, no mention is made of the deterrent effect of the citizenship demand on respondents. A significant share of respondents do not mail back their census questionnaire, requiring the Bureau to conduct in-person follow up. As discussed, the number of initial nonresponses will likely increase due to the citizenship demand, especially with respect to immigrant and minority populations. In-person follow up in these hard to count communities will intensify the fear and mistrust of government and jeopardize the trust and goodwill that Stakeholders have built within these communities. This burden will be unquestionably substantial and lasting; yet the Bureau's Federal Register notice fails entirely to quantify – or even attempt to quantify – this effect. And the Bureau itself will incur additional costs from these increased follow up efforts, estimated to be at least \$27.5 million. *See* Abowd Memo at 6.

Additionally, the burden on state and local governments, including Stakeholders, will likewise increase. We already devote significant time and resources to ensure an accurate count of our populations in the census, particularly within minority and immigrant populations. These efforts include training and educating local partners, updating address lists, hosting community events, engaging with community leaders and organizations, and working directly with minority and immigrant communities, parents, and teachers. We have already had to greatly increase these efforts to combat the deterrent effect caused by the citizenship demand, and will be required to expand these efforts even further.

#### ***V. The Bureau Has Not Taken Steps to Ensure the Quality, Utility, or Clarity of the Data***

In his haste to include the citizenship demand in the 2020 Census, the Secretary failed to follow statutory requirements, government-wide statistical standards, and the Bureau's own guidelines for census modifications. As a result, the overall quality, utility, and clarity of the census will be compromised. *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(2)(A)(iii).

Federal agencies are required to carefully design any questionnaire to “minimize respondent burden while maximizing data quality” to “achieve the highest rates of response.” The Information Quality Act (“IQA”), 2001 Pub. L. No. 106-554, § 515, 114 Stat. 2763 (Dec. 21, 2000). To achieve these goals, the IQA requires testing of each component of the questionnaire to maximize the “quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity” of the data gathered.

Pursuant to these requirements, and the Bureau's own Statistical Quality Standards, the census questionnaire undergoes years of extensive review leading up to its release. The process typically begins with internal research and development of content, language, layout, and order. The Bureau then reviews input from stakeholders and outside experts, field testing, and feedback from focus groups. These practices culminate in several major tests that measure every aspect of the proposed census. For each decennial census since 1970, the Bureau has spent at least three

years testing the proposed questionnaire; recently the Bureau spent almost ten years developing, testing, and evaluating just one proposed change to a question regarding race and ethnicity for the 2020 Census. *See* Memorandum, U.S. Census Bureau, *2020 Census Program Memorandum Series: 2018.02, Using Two Separate Questions for Race and Ethnicity in 2018 End-to-End Census Test and 2020 Census* (Jan. 26, 2018).

In announcing his decision four months ago to add the citizenship demand, the Secretary made clear that it has not gone through any of these crucial vetting procedures. The Bureau did not conduct any internal review of the content and language of the demand, and instead simply imported the format from the ACS, which was developed for different purposes and is a substantially different survey. And absolutely no testing was conducted on the citizenship demand. Field testing for the 2020 Census began in 2014, with additional testing performed in 2015, 2016, and 2017. The last major test for the 2020 Census began on April 1, 2018, which is essentially a run-through of the final format, testing not only content and design of the questionnaire, but also operations, procedures, systems, and infrastructure. The citizenship demand was not included in any of this testing, and there is no longer any opportunity to include it in any testing.

Nor did the Secretary follow the statutory requirements of the Census Act itself. Three years in advance of the census, the Secretary must submit to Congress a report proposing the subjects to be included. 13 U.S.C. § 141(f)(1). Then, two years before the census, the Secretary must submit to Congress the specific questions to be included in the census. *Id.* at § 141(f)(2). The Secretary may only later modify the subjects or questions if he submits a report to Congress finding that “new circumstances exist which necessitate” the modification. *Id.* at § 141(f)(3). This rule provides Congress a mechanism to review and evaluate any modifications in a timely and prudent fashion. The Secretary failed to include citizenship as a subject matter in his March 28, 2017 report to Congress, and also failed to submit a report justifying the modification. This omission harms Congress’s ability to evaluate the need, impact, and suitability of the citizenship demand.

The Bureau’s departure from its own testing standards and guidelines, and its failure to adhere to statutory requirements, is unprecedented. Because the citizenship demand underwent no testing whatsoever, the accuracy, integrity, and reliability of the census will be severely compromised. Indeed, alarmed by this lack of testing, six former Bureau Directors wrote that they “strongly believe that adding an untested question on citizenship status at this late point in the decennial planning process would put the accuracy of the enumeration and success of the census in all communities at grave risk.” Letter from Former Directors of Census Bureau to Wilbur Ross, *Washington Post Editorial-Opinion* (Jan. 26, 2018).

The decision to include a citizenship demand on the 2020 Census meets none of the requirements that apply to the Bureau’s information collection under the Paperwork Reduction Act: the collection is not necessary for the agency properly to perform its functions; the information has no practical utility; the Bureau’s burden estimates are strikingly deficient and underestimate the true burden of the demand for citizenship status; and the collection will fatally undermine the quality, utility, and clarity of the decennial census count. *See* 44 U.S.C. §

3506(c)(2)(A). Stakeholders oppose the decision to include a citizenship demand on the 2020 Census.

Sincerely,

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