**SAMPLE LETTER FROM A FUNDER TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL**

**ABOUT ADDING THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION**

April \_\_, 2018

Dear (Elected Official),’’

I write to you to draw attention to the news that a citizenship question will be added to the 2020 census and to encourage you to do all you can to see that the question is removed.

As you are aware, the 2020 census is less than two years away. Without an accurate population count, [*state/city/county*] may not have its fair representation in Washington and [*state capitol*] as well as lose millions of dollars in federal programs our communities rely on to build and maintain roads, schools, libraries, medical facilities; provide emergency services; support kids, veteran, and senior programs; and many other services that are essential to our communities’ quality of life. Businesses use census data to determine where to site offices and plants, open stores and create jobs. Census data helps foundations to understand trends and direct investment to address the communities’ urgent needs.

The Census Bureau has been underfunded and understaffed for a long time. It was only in March that Congress began providing an appropriate level of funds for the Census Bureau to begin adequately preparing for the count, which seeks to be largely online for the first time. While it is important to modernize the census there are concerns about the security of the Internet when providing private information, not to mention a digital divide that still exists. In addition, there are heightened levels of distrust of the government’s use of the data. These fears are likely to result in hard-to-count populations being even more reluctant than usual to self-respond. These hard-to-count residents include our renters, people of color, low-income households, young children, immigrants, and single-family households.

On March 26, Commerce Department Secretary Wilbur Ross announced the addition of a new question to the 2020 census that asks about the citizenship status of those living in households. Past Commerce Secretaries and Census Bureau Directors appointed by both Democratic and Republican presidents have warned that adding this untested question will likely significantly depress census participation, increase costs in follow up with non-responders, and ultimately lead to a less accurate census. Other census experts have expressed similar views.

Our foundation is committed to achieving a fair and accurate count because it is so critical to the health and well-being of our community. We have profound concerns about the last minute addition of the citizenship question. It will significantly add to the challenge of achieving an accurate census and likely add to the cost of garnering full participation. According to Census Bureau estimates from 2017 prior to adding the citizenship question, every one percent decrease in the self-response rate increases the cost of the count by $55 million. A conservative estimate of a five percent drop in self-response from adding the citizenship question would add an additional, unplanned $275 million cost to census operations as the Constitution requires an actual count of every person. In addition, we fear the quality of data so needed for planning and resources will be seriously eroded.

If the decision to add a citizenship question is not reversed, we fear it will have an adverse impact on the quality of the census and our community for the next decade. That is why I am asking you to do all you can to ensure that this question is removed from the 2020 census. We already face challenges to get everyone counted and do not need yet another new challenge.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,