

August 5, 2020 (Updated August 12 at 11:00 am)

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Steven Dillingham
Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Suitland, MD 20746

Re: 547 Philanthropic Leaders Say Do Not Cut the 2020 Census Short

Dear Secretary Ross and Director Dillingham:

We write in response to the Census Bureau's announcement that it intends to drastically cut short 2020 Census operations and subsequent, critical data improvement, processing, and review activities. We urge the Census Bureau to maintain its constitutional responsibilities to enumerate every household that has not responded on its own, in order to achieve a fair and accurate count. Given the pandemic, there is every reason to believe the Census Bureau will need to collect data through October 31, a date the Census Bureau itself had earlier announced was needed to meet its obligations.

We are leaders of nonpartisan philanthropic institutions from across the country, large and small, giving hundreds of millions of dollars each year to advance the common good and improve the quality of life in the United States. We have different funding approaches, are ideologically diverse, and do not always share the same priorities. But we have come together to support a fair and accurate 2020 Census, with a focus on historically undercounted communities, including people of color, low-income and immigrant families, and young children. We all oppose cutting short the 2020 Census in the midst of a global pandemic.

Across our varied institutions, we share a belief that reliable and accurate data are a necessary foundation for a well-functioning government, robust civil society, and thriving business sector in the United States. We rely on accurate census data to help identify community needs and prioritize grantmaking, and our grantees and partners rely on accurate census data to advocate for and improve our communities, through their work on various issues, including poverty, health care, criminal justice reform, racial equity, education, homelessness and housing, and infrastructure.

Collectively, many of our institutions have invested more than \$100 million in rural and urban communities across the country in support of the Census Bureau's efforts to educate and persuade households about the importance of participating in the 2020 Census. The census has already faced numerous hurdles this decade, including a pandemic that required operational modifications in order to prioritize the health and safety of the census workforce and the American public. The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the Census Bureau to recruit, train, and retain enumerators, and is still preventing in-person contact in many areas.

According to an analysis by the Center for Urban Research at City University of New York's Graduate Center, only four states and 14% of the country's counties have achieved their 2010 level of self-response -- and they had nearly three extra months when compared to 2010. With nearly four out of ten households still to be counted, many of us have deepened our engagement and made additional grants to organizations in support of outreach plans that rely on the Bureau's announced October 31 end date for field operations.

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Rushing the census would unnecessarily impair our nation's collective efforts to achieve a fair and accurate 2020 Census. It would hurt a diverse range of rural and urban communities, leaving them underrepresented locally and in Congress and cutting their fair share of federal funding for Medicaid, economic development, child care, schools, road and public transit improvements, home heating assistance for senior citizens, and many more vital services.

For all the reasons stated above, we urge you to maintain the October 31 end date for the door knocking and self-response operations and ensure that the subsequent quality checks and data processing work is done thoroughly and in accordance with the Census Bureau's own quality standards. Thank you for your attention. If you have any questions or need any further information, please contact Gary Bass at the Bauman Foundation (baumanfoundation@baumanfoundation.org).

Sincerely,

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