



August 18, 2020

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

Director Steven Dillingham, Ph.D.  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Road  
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Secretary Ross & Director Dillingham:

We write to you deeply concerned about the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent operational change to the 2020 Census in which the response and data collection period is slashed by an entire month from October 31 to September 30, 2020. We respectfully urge you to revise your plans and extend the enumeration deadline back to at least October 31, 2020, so that no person or community is left out of the 2020 Census.

Your recent announcement calls into question how millions of Americans who have yet to fill out their 2020 Census will be counted. It is surprising to hear how optimistic the Census Bureau is about being able to reach 100% in less than 60 days, given the current daily self-response rate and the fact that, as of the writing of this letter, only [63%](#) of the country has responded to the 2020 Census. By your own calculations made when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the October 31 date is crucial for the Census Bureau to be able to meet its constitutional obligation and do it in a way that does not jeopardize the public health.

Further, many areas of the country do not yet have a date determined for when Non-Response Follow Up (NRFU) operations will commence. To set a certain end date before a vast majority of the country knows when their NRFU operations will begin does not make sense.

As examples, in Oregon, nearly 1.3 million people are considered Hard to Count (HTC), and the state has been working diligently over the last 20 months with a multitude of partners across the state and across sectors to ensure a fair, accurate, and complete count for Oregon. In Michigan, 3.3 million people are considered HTC based on the Census Bureau's own Low Response Score calculation which factors in internet access, rental rates and more to determine which areas are less likely to respond to the 2020 census. In Washington, the State Legislature invested more than \$15 million to support a network of trusted messengers connected to the Hard-to-Count communities that could explain the importance of the Census and the confidentiality of responses and encourage participation. The sudden decision to shorten the timeline by a month threatens that significant investment. At present, Census tracts with low self-response rates in the state have greater proportions of those populations that have been historically undercounted and would benefit from a robust NRFU effort.

The newly adjusted deadline for response makes us especially concerned that our key partners will not be able to do the outreach necessary to reach Tribal communities, immigrant and refugee communities, communities of color, and rural communities. These communities are already being disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and not providing them enough time to complete their 2020 Census would be denying them valuable resources needed for their recovery from this crisis.

Our states have made dedicated efforts to ensuring that HTC populations are reached by trusted partners through culturally specific and responsive outreach and communications. It is critical that all Americans are aware of the importance of the Census and are provided equitable opportunities to participate. An inaccurate count will deprive communities of resources, political power and the federal assistance necessary to recover from the pandemic for the next 10 years.

The decennial Census is the foundation of our democracy and tells the story of who we are and where we are going as a nation. Federal funding for essential services and congressional representation is on the line, and it is crucial that we achieve a complete and accurate count.

To that end, we would again ask that you fulfill your constitutionally mandated duties to ensure not a single person is left out of the 2020 Census by extending the response deadline.

Sincerely,



Governor Kate Brown, Oregon



Governor Phil Scott, Vermont



Governor Jared Polis, Colorado



Governor JB Pritzker, Illinois



Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Michigan



Governor Andrew Cuomo, New York



Governor Roy Cooper, North Carolina



Governor Jay Inslee, Washington