

October 26, 2017

The Honorable Trey Gowdy
Chairman
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
Ranking Member
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee:

We, the undersigned members of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs, in response to the House Oversight Committee Hearing held on October 12, 2017, urge Congress to increase funding to \$1.935 billion for the U.S. Census Bureau for FY 2018, in accordance with the 2020 American Census Investment Act (HR 4013). Our various faith traditions compel us to care for those most in need, and providing adequate funding for an effective 2020 Census is a crucial prerequisite for federal policies and programs to respond to the needs of everyone in the country, especially marginalized communities.

As faith leaders, we know that the census is an essential tool to understand ourselves as a people. In the Christian tradition, for example, the story of Jesus begins with his parents' journey to be counted. In the Hebrew Scriptures Moses also counted the Israelites. Today, many of our churches and congregations use the census to allocate future resources and define parish lines, or to understand where new churches are most needed. As a nation, an accurate census plays an important role in ensuring all people can live with dignity by increasing access to vital safety net support services.

Current funding levels for the Census Bureau are woefully inadequate to perform a fair, accurate and modern 2020 Decennial Census. The \$1.507 billion approved by the House for FY 2018, is \$14 million below the recommendation by the Senate Appropriations Committee and does not reflect even the conservatively adjusted FY 2018 funding needs estimated by the Commerce Departmentⁱ. Funding shortfalls in FY 2017 have already impaired preparations and testing in the ramp-up to the 2020 Decennial which have, in turn, contributed to higher funding needs in FY 2018. Uncertainty about congressional appropriations in FY 2018 has already caused the Census Bureau to halt plans for important tests and is increasingly putting the success of the 2020 Census at risk.

An underfunded, inaccurate 2020 Census will skew the projections of needed resources and programs away from the communities that need them most. Historically, we have seen a disproportionate undercounting of people of color, young children, and renters, an indicator for low-income households. These groups have been underrepresented in previous decennial censuses for decades; and for some populations—for example, young children—the undercount has been getting progressively worse. We know that, in 2010 for example, 2.2 million children under the age of five were not included in the census results.ⁱⁱ Now, additional populations — such as rural residents and older Americans—may experience new or increased vulnerability to being undercounted due to major changes in methodology, such as relying on the Internet as the primary way for households to respond to the 2020 Censusⁱⁱⁱ. Being hard-to-count can deprive people and their communities of equal political representation and their fair share of vital public and private resources.

If the Census Bureau does not receive increased funding to properly prepare and carry-out the 2020 Decennial count, we fear that the most vulnerable in our communities will be undercounted and under-

supported. While we come from different faith traditions, we support an effective and equitable 2020 Census because:

- We share a belief in human dignity for all;
- We know federal assistance plays an important role in ensuring all people can live with dignity by increasing access to affordable housing, health, and nutrition;
- The 2020 Census will determine the allocation of \$450 billion in federal assistance to state and local governments for the implementation of crucial programs; these programs are crucial to our ability to minister to those most in need;
- State and local rebuilding and recovery efforts for areas impacted by recent natural disasters will need to utilize Census data to help these devastated communities heal;
- Census data is used to monitor and enforce important federal programs that enable people to live into their full potential, such as the Job Training Partnership Act, the Older Americans Act, and the Civil Rights Act.
- Undercounting communities reduces their political representation and decreases their share of federal funding and support, further marginalizing them; and
- A poorly-funded Census will negatively affect all, but particularly those most in need who will go uncounted if the Census Bureau cannot adequately prepare.

As an interreligious community of organizations, we urge you to support an equitable Census as a moral obligation. Our faith traditions teach that all humans possess inherent dignity—that everybody counts. Therefore, we believe that nobody should go uncounted in our democracy. It is unacceptable that inadequate funding would render the Census Bureau unable to meet the requirement of conducting a decennial census that counts everyone. We urge you to fulfill your Constitutional and moral obligation for a fair and accurate 2020 Census by appropriating \$1.935 billion to fund the Census Bureau for FY 2018.

Sincerely,

Bread for the World
Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Ecumenical Poverty Initiative
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Methodist Federation for Social Action
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union For Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

cc: Senator Richard Shelby, Chair, Commerce Justice and Science and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Commerce Justice and Science and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
Representative John Culberson, Chair, Commerce Justice and Science and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
Representative José Serrano, Ranking Member, Commerce Justice and Science and Related
Agencies Subcommittee

ⁱ Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce; Committee on Oversight and Government Reform; U.S. House of Representatives; 12 October 2017. < <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Written-SWLR-HOGR-Testimony-FINAL.pdf>>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau (2016). U.S. Census Bureau (2016b) Investigating the 2010 Undercount of Young Children—A New Look at 2010 Census Omissions by Age, July 26, 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Vanita Gupta, President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
<https://civilrights.org/statement-vanita-gupta-house-committee-oversight-government-reform-hearing-2020-census/>